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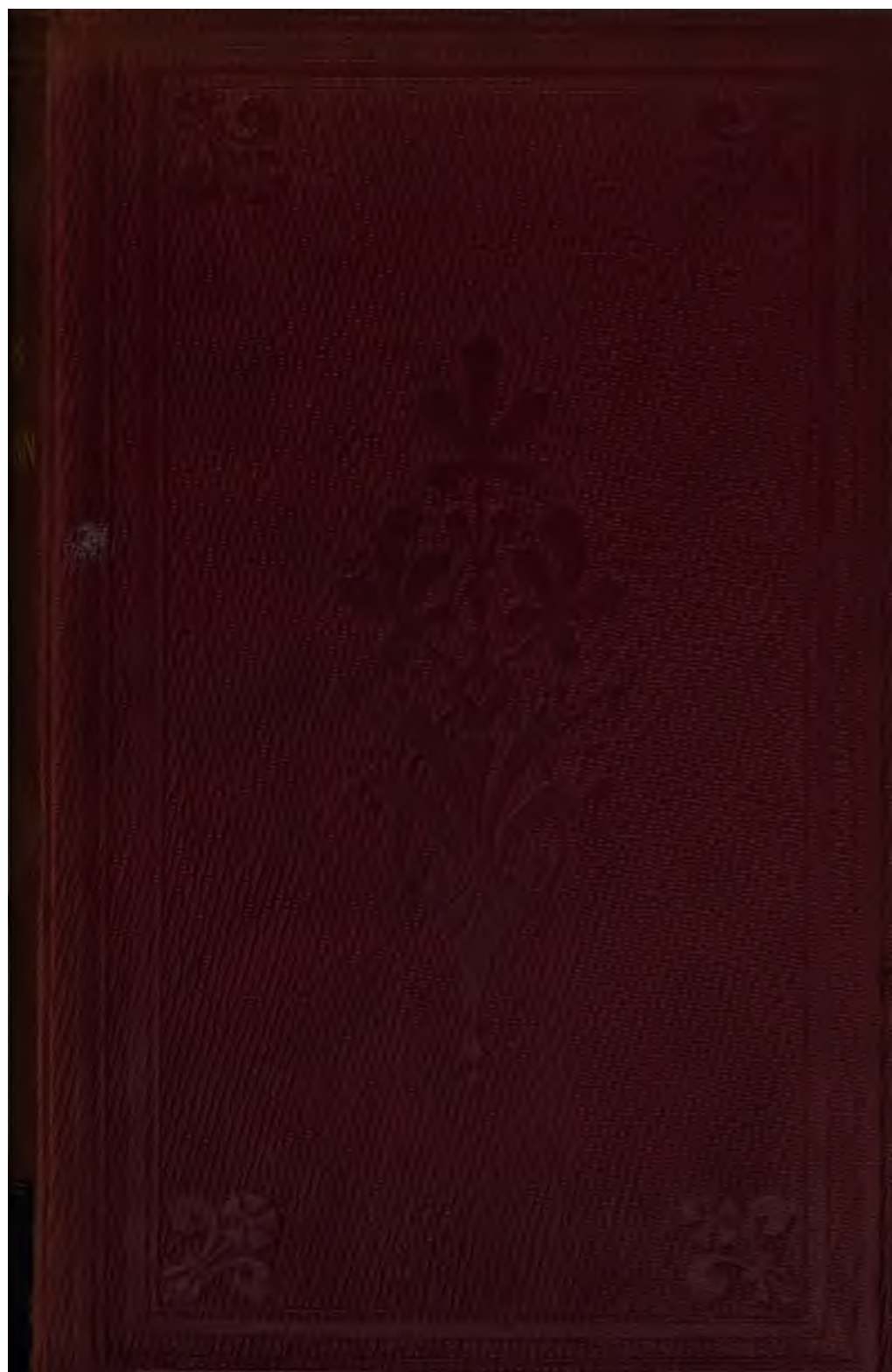
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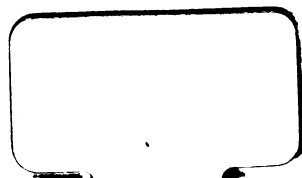
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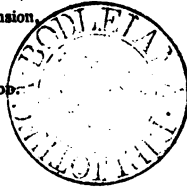


THE  
DENNES OF DAUNDELYONN.

BY  
MRS. CHARLES J. PROBY.

"It might be only on enchanted ground,  
It might be only by a thought's expansion,  
But in the spirit, or the flesh, I found  
An old deserted mansion."

T. Hoop-



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE  
DENNES OF DAUNDELYONN.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

FRESHFIELD.

“But here, oh here,  
Where all is coldly, comfortlessly costly,  
All strange, all new in uncouth gorgeousness,  
Lofty and long, a wider space for misery—  
E’en my own footsteps on these marble floors  
Are unaccustomed, unfamiliar sounds.”

MILMAN.

HAD I travelled the wide world over in search of a house to contrast with No. 9, High Street, Whirlingham, I could not have found one better suited to my purpose than Angelica’s home.

Home! did I say? I can scarcely bring my-

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self to call anything so unhomelike by that endearing appellation. Everything pertaining to Freshfield was handsome, staid, costly, perfectly new, and inexpressive. No one could possibly call it comfortable, though all must have assented to its being costly.

My brother-in-law was one of those persons who possess just wit enough to be aware of his own deficiencies, without a glimmering perception of how he should correct them. With an irresistible craving to achieve something above the common herd of country gentlemen, he was utterly unable to devise that something. He feared to implicate himself by asserting a taste of his own, be that taste never so strong, lest the world should call it a bad one.

Everything around him was influenced by this fear. Although naturally fond of brilliant colours, he dared not indulge the fondness, lest the tone of his rooms should be considered questionable. His taste for ornament was similarly fettered lest it might be pronounced "Roccoco."

Fear of the opinions of his acquaintances compelled him, greatly against his will, to be for

ever selling his horses and purchasing others. In the matter of pictures, he so dreaded ridicule for possessing bad ones, that he resolved to escape the dilemma by having none at all.

Freshfield and its contents certainly defied criticism: if there was nothing to praise, there was nothing to condemn; nothing to admire, nothing to abuse.

The house was plain, solid, spacious, and externally utterly featureless: large, square, in excellent repair, and built of a pale-coloured stone, it stood at one end of a grassy valley, which sloped down to the sea in one expanse of yellowish grass, fringed with stunted fir-trees of a dark and mournful brownish green.

Upon this rather desolate-looking half-lawn, half-paddock, the windows of both dining and drawing-rooms opened. The garden was at one side of the house, the stables and offices on the other. In the rear was a large square yard, paved with flints always in a state of semi-humidity, and containing a dog-kennel full of ferocious inmates—at whose daily liberation persons indulging them in their amusements always

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stood at a respectful distance, for fear of any unpleasant playfulness on their sudden rush into daylight. Beyond this yard ran a few fields, sloping rather abruptly upwards until the scene was closed by a formal well kept holly-hedge of ancient growth.

The general aspect of these arrangements was not a pleasing one, more particularly when contrasted with the rich and varied panorama which always greeted our eyes at dear old Daundelyonn. Within the mansion things were not much better. The drawing-room was large and lofty; stone-coloured carpets, drab silk curtains, and pale normal grey walls, unrelieved by the faint fawn-coloured tone of the doors, window-sills, and satin-wood furniture, wearied the eye by their dreary continuity. The ornaments, few in number, were more costly than graceful: a square uncompromising time-piece, always painfully exact in point of time, a pair of large alabaster vases with griffins for handles, and a couple of massive glass candelabra, completed the embellishments of the broad expanse of marble chimney-piece; while on a table, in solitary state, the undisputed occu-

pant of one side of the room, stood a huge glass shade, sheltering from dust and inquiring fingers a whole aviary of humming-birds, stuffed to perfection.

Order and regularity are very desirable arrangements ; no house can ever be long endurable without them : but like salt and pepper in cookery, one may have too much of a good thing ; and certainly here they were administered with an unsparing hand.

Since his marriage, Sir Brutus had aged remarkably : most old husbands of young wives either do, or seem to do so ; and his habits appeared to have acquired a corresponding rigidity. From being simply a staunch adherent to these laws, Sir Brutus had now become their apostle ; his existence seemed to be given him only for the purpose of proving to what an extent both order and regularity could be enforced. Even at the dinner-table he sat, his eye everywhere, with a slip of paper and pencil hidden under his plate ; whence he drew it every now and then to note down any misadventure which might occur : and woe betide on the morrow the luck-



less servant who transgressed the laws he had established. Draco's ordinances were mild by comparison. For a guest to leave a stray pencil on a table was a peccadillo; to alter the position of a chair a misdemeanour; to forget to shut a door a personal affront; to open a window, leaving a blind fluttering in the indraft of air, a crime of the deepest dye. As to any individual venturing to make their appearance five minutes (by the immaculate clock) too late for breakfast or dinner (the only meals here recognised), that was a dereliction of duty not to be borne; it would assuredly have induced a fit of the gout, and earned the delinquent the forfeiture of his good opinion for ever.

The occurrences of the evening on which I arrived at Freshfield, might be taken as a fair specimen of the general style of society and conversation which prevailed night after night.

Angelica and her Spouse seldom dined alone; perhaps experience proved that *tête-à-têtes* were to be avoided. He liked his rubber, and she took care to have a relief of old cronies always at hand

to make up a table for him, thereby herself escaping the martyrdom of a long evening at short whist.

A stray Indian General, bronzed, bilious, and garrulous; a wandering Admiral, weather-beaten, and afflicted with chalk stones in his hands (and possibly in his feet also), with a be-knighted physician, were to be found as "constant quantities." A ruddy Major from the neighbouring depôt; a raw-boned country gentleman, Squire Fenton by name, and his kind, fussy, vulgar wife, with our old friend and favourite, Miss Crockett, generally completed the circle.

"What train did you come by, Sophie?" asked Sir Brutus, as dessert was placed upon the table (he never voluntarily conversed during the process of dinner).

"I think we left Whirlingham at ten, or half-past," I replied; "Louis arranged the journey for me, so I hardly know exactly."

"We ordered the carriage to be at the station at half-past five o'clock," said Sir Brutus. "Let me see, that would make seven hours, or seven and a half, to do the distance in. How many

miles? How many miles should you say it was from Whirlingham to Freshfield?"

"Really I cannot say," I answered; "it seemed as though the journey would never come to an end."

"The average rate of speed would be,—how many miles an hour? If we could ascertain that; knowing the number of hours occupied in the journey, we might then arrive at or near an approximation of the distance." This profound remark might have led to others equally curious, had not the General here interposed with a long and incomprehensible story about some wonderful rate of travelling attained by him in India; but so interspersed was it with Anglo-Indian terms of description, and so generally unintelligible, that I prefer to give it as nearly in his own phraseology as circumstances will permit.

"And so the tattie told my durbar, that if the dhoolie did not fail us, we should reach Goriambobberie before the havildar: "Punkah Sahib," said he, "punkah tiffin; and e'cod sir, I took him at his word, and before the jelty jow had seen the last of Chunee, we cried 'Right

about face,' taza bi taza, and cut stick for Korrigaum."

Before he had time to proceed further with this jargon, the Admiral broke in somewhat after the following fashion :—

"Talking of travelling, it puts me in mind that I was once cruising in the Salamander, off the Andaman Islands, when I was a reefer; there was a stiff breeze blowing north-west-and-by-south, thick weather to starboard, and an ugly squall coming up the mizen. 'Belay,' says the skipper; 'belay, all hands, and keep a good look-out on the binnacle. If the topgallant forecastle springs a leak, down with your helm, heave her in stays, my boys, and luff to windward, or it's all up with us: ' the taffrail went by the board, the mainsail was split, and you may fancy what a devil of a mess we were in."

"By the by, talking of hunting," said the hitherto silent Squire—no one had even so much as hinted at that exhilarating sport, but he was evidently burning with the desire not to be left an unentertaining member of the conclave, so, being a man deficient in tact, and conversant with no

subject in which speed was an element except hunting, he lugged in his small addition ruthlessly by the neck and heels.

"Talking of hunting," said he, "the other day, we were running a merry bat for twenty minutes as hard as we could split. I, and two or three other hard riders; well, we were all leading the field, over yawners enough to satisfy the greatest glutton at that sort of work; as I said, for twenty minutes we burst along as hard as we could split; the day was fine, and sinking the wind, the pace began to tell terribly on the young dogs, when ——"

"Pardon me, Fenton; the wine is with you," said Sir Brutus.

Thus violently recalled to wine instead of hunting, the thread of his story was snapped; so, after filling his glass, poor Fenton subsided behind his shirt collars, nestling himself therein with a dejected air, and began to twirl his wine-glass between his finger and thumb, seeking thereby to gain an inspiration as to what should be his next *coup d'essai*.

"I don't do much in the hunting line myself,

now-a-days; I carry too much weight about me," said the Major, with a *striking* appeal to his *physique*; "but some of our fellows had a capital run last season: Lamps was one; you know Lamps, Sir Brutus, the man who rides in spectacles, so we call him Lamps, though his real name is Godfrey. 'Jump-up-behind' was another; you don't know 'Jump-up-behind,' Sir Brutus: I mean Harry Hamilton; but we call him 'Jump-up-behind' because he backed some bills for 'Gravel-walk,' and had to pay them, of course. I don't know how they settled the matter; but, by the bye, 'Gravel-walk' was there too. You know Captain Bloomfield, Lady Bouverie; we nicknamed him 'Gravel-walk' because his servants all wear such broad gold lace, like gravel walks, round their hats, and he always has one of them following him. Well, they had a capital run, so they said: they never had a better run in their lives; met just by the Tomfool Tavern, broke cover at Sawney Cross, and killed, after a tremendous run of one hour and twenty minutes, at Gander's Green."

The ladies did not remain any longer to enjoy the benefit of further stories of this thrilling kind;

for neither Angelica, Miss Crockett, nor myself, delighted in long *séances* after dinner, particularly in the absence of wit or winning anecdote. So my sister immediately gave that indescribable warning, which is something between a bow, a smile, a cough, and a look of astonished interrogation; whereupon, after dipping of fingers in rose-water, drawing on of gloves, and edging back of chairs, we swept out of the room; only delayed momentarily by Mrs. Fenton dropping her pocket-handkerchief, after the usual fashion of stout ladies with little or no lap, and its being fished up by her plethoric neighbour the Major, not without much wheezing and grunting, and some danger to buttons and braces.

Returned once more to the drawing-room, while Mrs. Fenton and Miss Crockett chatted together, Angelica and I had much to talk about, a thousand questions to ask, and answer. I amused her with a description of Florence and her household cares, receiving in return a whole budget of news about Daundelyonn and the neighbourhood.

Poor Uncle Edward was failing fast: his health was visibly worse than when I left him; his

memory was greatly affected; and the care and anxiety he suffered about money matters had tried him sorely, more so even than the death of Aunt Barbara.

“He may have felt that more deeply, but he shows this more openly I think,” continued Angelica, sadly: “and his is no uncommon case; the great misfortunes which fall upon us direct from the hand of God may sometimes break the heart, but seldom try the temper; while the petty trials and troubles of daily life, coming as they do modified through the medium of man, ruin the temper, but never touch the heart.”

“That is very true,” I replied; “the effect of the former is at once to elevate and soften, while that of the latter is to debase and harden our natures.”

A considerable pause in our conversation here ensued, and I could not help hearing what Miss Crockett and the Squire's wife were talking about.

“Yes, my dear Miss Crockett,” observed Mrs. Fenton, “ten children must be a great trouble, as you may suppose. I'm sure sometimes I don't



know which way to turn: and yet they're good children, too; though I say it, that shouldn't perhaps."

"To be sure," replied Miss Crockett, quickly, "children are a calamity when good, and a curse when bad; and bad are the best, I'm afraid: they very much resemble children of a larger growth: it's human nature, my dear Ma'am, and we must go on never minding to the end of the chapter."

"Never mending?" exclaimed Mrs. Fenton, who being rather deaf, had not quite caught the last few words distinctly. "I do assure you, my good lady, that I never cease mending from morning till night; it is nothing but sew, sew, sew, patch, patch, patch, from one week's end to the other: as to the socks and stockings, they are as full of holes as a colander. I am sure I mend two dozen pairs a day, if I mend one; and I really sometimes go to bed, and darn all night through in my dreams."

"Oh, good gracious," replied the small listener, "how glad I am that I'm a single woman: whenever I feel inclined to repine because I didn't marry and am all alone in the world, I shall

think of your darning dreams, and bless my stars that I'm a spinster."

"Oh, you don't know what I have to go through," continued Mrs. Fenton, who spoke with that disagreeably loud nasal drawl which deaf people so often inflict upon their hearers; "the physicking alone is enough to turn one's hair grey. Powders for Harry, and pills for Lucy, and drafts for Matilda, and decoctions for this child, and infusions for that. Prescriptions and plaisters, liniments and lotions, besides ointments and embrocations; one child down with measles, and another laid up with a sprained ankle; Johnny with the mumps, and baby just vaccinated: I'm sure nobody need wish to be mother of ten; you're a lucky woman to have no one to look after but yourself."

Here Angelica came to Miss Crockett's relief, who took the vacant place by me.

"Well, my dear Sophie," said she, kindly, "we shall be glad to have you back again among us; we don't get on so well without you, somehow, my love."

"I'm glad, and sorry both, to hear that, dear Miss Crockett."

"No, my child; you were wanted by Florence, no doubt, and you are wanted at home: but," continued the old lady, dropping her voice to a whisper, "you are wanted *here* too."

"Here!" I exclaimed, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes, here: it's a fine house, isn't it? and this is a fine room, isn't it? and we are all very fine people, or we think we are, and that's just as good; but, Sophie, my dear, look round you; there's a fault in the house, although it's so handsome. Did you ever see any furniture which had so little expression? Were you ever in such a monotonous room in your life? What sort of effect do you suppose the constant living in such rooms and mixing exclusively with such people as we meet here to-night, would be likely to have upon a lively intellectual woman? My dear, it would drive her mad, melancholy mad; or kill her outright, by inducing nervous affections: particularly if her health were already broken. In spite of Angelica's kindness, and Sir Brutus' hospitality, I never spend a week here without feeling *stale*: what must it be for *her*?"

"She does not look well, does she, Miss Crockett?" I inquired.

"How can she, my dear, when she suffers a martyrdom from neuralgia in both head and face? She never complains or makes a fuss; it would not be like her to do so; and she never gives way: down early and up late, and keeping her establishment in order. Did you ever see such beautiful order in any house? But think, my dear, of the daily struggle it must be! What a fiery trial to do all this with pain gnawing at your cheek-bones like a tiger; no wonder that she looks ill!"

Perhaps Angelica had not the power of extracting amusement or inculcating advice which Miss Crockett possessed; for, upon some pretext or other, she passed in a few moments over to the other side of the room. Mrs. Fenton, being left alone, immediately arose and joined us, just arriving in time to catch the last few words spoken; and these she misinterpreted as having been addressed to me.

"Lor! Miss Crockett," she observed, "I think I never saw Miss Denne looking better."

"I was not saying that Miss Denne looked ill, replied Miss Crockett, "but that Lady Bouverie looks far from well."

"Oh, I beg pardon; yes, indeed, Lady Bouverie does look care-worn and anxious: the charge of such a large establishment must be a great undertaking, and to keep it so beautifully as she does too! And how is Mrs. Grey, Miss Denne? it is an age since I saw her. Has she a nice house? and is she as good a manager as her sister?"

I could not help laughing as I replied—

"Oh dear, no! my sister Florence is a very different person. She, as you know, married a poor clergyman, and has a large family compressed into a very small house. I cannot say much in praise of their present establishment, though Florence seems quite content with it."

"Ay, ay," replied Mrs. Fenton, with a suppressed yawn, "some marry for love and some for money, and if they are not quite as comfortable or as happy as their neighbours, they must just make the best of it; 'as they make their bed so they must lie in it.'"

Accustomed as I was to Miss Crockett's eccentricities, I was not prepared for the effect of poor Mrs. Fenton's aphorism upon her; no wild cat ever sprang upon its prey with greater ferocity than she did upon that harmless matron.

"Mrs. Fenton, Ma'am," she exclaimed, breathlessly, "I ask you, as the mother of a large family, how you can justify yourself for quoting such an objectionable reflection?"

Mrs. Fenton quite quailed beneath the implied reproach.

"Yes, Ma'am, I know what you would say: it is a proverb. I am quite aware of the fact, my dear Madam: it is one as old as the hills, perhaps even older; but let me tell you that there is a class of proverbs eminently calculated to mislead the mind and enervate the body; this is one instance—'As you make your bed so you must lie in it'—monstrous! It is one of those most ridiculous of all exploded saws with which unreflecting people dilute their frivolities. Admitting your bed to be badly made, what is there to prevent your getting up and remaking it? Or if you consider it as a question for the conduct

of life, why, if you have made an uncomfortable moral bed, should you remain in it? Why not set about correcting the error? I hate such common-places. It is quite as silly and insufferable as that other maxim, which pronounces it to be 'A long lane that has no turning,' which would seem to advise every one to go maundering on between two hedges instead of boldly leaping one or the other, and so getting out of the difficulty."

Mrs. Fenton looked aghast at this sudden outburst of Miss Crockett's; she settled her dress, smoothed her lace, counted the sticks in her fan, and seemed generally uncomfortable. She was, in fact, in that peculiar state which she herself would under other circumstances have called "a taking," when the door opened and admitted the gentlemen from the dining-room; upon which she waddled off, glad of the opportunity to escape from a perilous predicament by joining her husband.

"Dear Miss Crockett," said I, "you have frightened Mrs. Fenton; poor woman, she ——."

"I know very well what you are going to say," replied Jenny Wren, "but that woman is

a fool—a well-meaning, inveterate fool, and she was going to indulge us with a series of those wonderful remarks called proverbs. My love, I dislike them beyond measure; they positively disagree with me: they are almost as irritating to my system,” said she, half laughing, “as our old friend King Solomon himself, so I nipped them in the bud, Sophie, my dear.”

Whist and wine and water wound up the evening, at the close of which Mrs. Fenton took her departure, under the shelter of a black silk calash as large as a carriage-hood. The remaining guests soon followed. Tired with my long journey and the somewhat tedious *soirée* which followed it, I was heartily glad to say “Good-night,” and find myself ensconced among the pillows of a most luxurious bed, comforted by the conviction that “Aunt Sophie” might lie there in peace until a reasonable hour in the morning.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## FOR ONCE TOO LATE.

"I've waked and slept through many nights and days  
Since then,—but still that day will catch my breath  
Like a nightmare. There are fatal days, indeed,  
In which the fibrous years have taken root  
So deeply, that they quiver to their tops  
Whene'er you stir the dust of such a day."

E. B. BROWNING.

"WHAT is the matter with Fuss?" said Miss Crockett, as, dressed for dinner, we were seated together in the drawing-room. "See how he is scratching and whining at the door!"

"Quiet, Fuss, quiet," I cried; "if Sir Brutus sees you scratching his velvet pile carpets after that fashion, you will be exiled to the stables, little doggie. There, be off as fast as you can;" and, as I opened the door, away went Fuss helter-skelter, while I returned to my seat beside Miss Crockett.

"Has anything been heard of Harold? or has he written since I have been away? I have not ventured to mention his name here."

"No, my love; no one has heard from him; but a cousin of mine, just returned from California, declares that he met him in the street at Sacramento in a very outlandish garb, with a long bushy beard; but, on accosting him, he denied all knowledge of such a place as Daundelyonn, and said his name was Henry Ditchfield."

"Could it have been Harold? The initials are the same. Did he seem in good circumstances?"

"My cousin said that he looked ragged and wretched enough," replied Miss Crockett, "but that goes for nothing out there, you know. He seemed to have plenty of money at his command, and was last seen, surrounded by half-a-dozen rough subjects like himself, drinking champagne out of a bucket. There's that tiresome dog at the door again; do let him in, my dear."

As I did so, Fuss entered panting and breathless. I bade him lie down, and he obeyed.

We continued to talk of Harold, and then of Eric.

"What news from Michael Angelo?" asked Miss Crockett.

"Excellent," said I; "here is a long letter I received from him whilst at Whirlingham, in which he gives glowing accounts of his success and prospects. He has sold several pictures at very high prices, and has orders for more than he knows how to execute. I'll read what he says:—

"You and your sisters will go down to posterity (I am too modest to say that you will be immortalized), for I have reproduced your well-remembered faces in all sorts of subjects. Florence has been idealized into a languishing Dudu, and swarthy Cleopatra, 'brow bound with burning gold;' she has figured as an Italian peasant girl, a Roman Empress, a Circassian slave. You have been depicted as an inspired Sappho, a Lurley, a penitent Magdalen, a Circe, and a Cassandra. While Angelica (I beg pardon, Lady Bouverie) has been an Eve tempted by the serpent, a Una, a fair Geraldine, and a Margaret to Count Max's Faust.

“ ‘The latter amiable individual has been here for some time studying art and nature, and sighing and smoking over his vain efforts to copy my Sappho; which, without flattering either you or myself, I may say that I consider my best picture.

“ ‘Having raised enough money by the sale of these small sketches, for they are little more, to keep the coffee-pot boiling and to purchase macaroni enough to last a month, besides sending a small cheque to dear old Daddy, (but let this be a secret between us), I am now rewarding myself by painting a larger and more finished picture, ‘The Metempsychosis of Psyche.’ As yet I have only completed the outline and general design; some part of the back-ground is got in, and the face of Psyche, in which I have again taken Angelica, with some slight modification, as my model. And, if I may believe Max, I have succeeded in portraying a face and form lovely enough to have won Love’s own fickle deity into fetering himself with the shackles of marriage. She is soaring upwards, her newly fledged butterfly wings are defined against a purple sky, the

starry wreath of Immortality is on her brow. Far below in gathering twilight lies, or is to lie, the earth; but a radiant and mysterious light from above is falling on her face, revealing the lambent lustre of her violet eyes, and streaking her wavy hair with golden light. Pardon me, dearest Coz, if I grow enthusiastic and incoherent about my picture, for we artists are a weak vain race, and I mean this to be, and know it will be, my master-piece. I wish you could see it, Soph; the glow of light and love which fires her cheek, the liquid lustre of her eye, the affluence of youth and health and happiness, above all the glorious halo of Immortality!

“Even allowing for a trifle of flattery, I am sure Angelica would be gratified by the way in which I have introduced her in my *chef d'œuvre*, and Sir Brutus would break through his ordinary dread of modern art for once, and offer its weight in gold for my exquisite Psyche!”

“Is it not delightful,” exclaimed Miss Crockett, “to see any one so thoroughly devoted to his art as Eric seems to be? I think I must take

to painting myself. There's that tiresome dog scratching to be let out again; do open the door for him. I think he wants Angelica."

"There, Fuss," said I, angrily, once more opening the door; "now go about your business, and don't come here any more."

Fuss looked up at me for a moment with a piteous expression, gave a dismal little howl, and "scuttled away" with his tail between his legs.

"Don't you think Angelica is looking better to-day?" asked Miss Crockett.

"Yes," I replied; "I think this is one of her good days; but she looks pale and thin."

"But," added Miss Crockett, "I don't like those neuralgic pains; the more so that she says so little about them."

"Angelica," I remarked, "is one of those reticent, undemonstrative persons who never complain, suffer what they may. Eric used to call her the concentrated essence of self-control. I am afraid that her bright colour is at times more the flush of pain than the bloom of health."

"My dear Sophie, I have occasionally thought so too; but she has recently been so well, so

much like her old self, that I hoped she was fast losing those horrid pains. Has she medical advice? Does Sir Brutus know that she suffers?"

"No, certainly not; and she would never forgive my telling him."

"Hark! here he comes; let us change the subject for the present."

"What a capital number this is of *Blackwood*, Miss Crockett," said I, changing my tone, as Sir Brutus, undeniably got up for dinner, entered the room.

Greetings to Miss Crockett were followed by the usual meteorological conjectures and assertions, without which no Englishman seems capable of commencing any conversation.

"Remarkably seasonable weather this; crops fine, and the glass rising: remarkably seasonable indeed. I rode over this morning to inspect the model cottages, and they are getting on favourably, I may say famously. And I have a piece of good news for Angelica; the subscription list for the schools, about which she was so anxious, is closed at last, so they will be commenced forthwith. Down, Fuss; down, sir." This was ad-

dressed to poor Fuss, who had stolen in again with his master.

"Angelica showed me the site you have so generously given for these schools, as we drove over yesterday," I observed; "a healthy breezy situation, quiet yet not too remote, just such a place as is best suited for a school."

"Yes," added Sir Brutus, with a gratified smile: "yes; I think the situation all that can be desired. Lady Bouverie selected it herself. She has such good taste and judgment that we could not go far wrong in following out her suggestions. Can that clock be right? It wants only five minutes to the dinner hour."

Miss Crockett consulted her watch.

"Yes, Sir Brutus, it is right; at least, it is only three minutes too slow by my repeater."

"Very strange," murmured Sir Brutus. "Down, Fuss, down. I never knew Lady Bouverie so late before; ah, well, there are still five minutes to spare. She is so extremely punctual, something unusual has detained her no doubt."

"Some poor person in distress," I suggested.

"Very possibly," replied Sir Brutus; "she is



sure to be here directly. I saw Mr. Fenton to-day," he continued; "his little boy George has the measles: Mrs. Fenton particularly wished us to know it. Sophie, that dog will certainly tear your flounces; go away directly, Fuss: down, sir;" and again appealing to the clock, his own watch, and Miss Crockett's repeater for confirmation, he rather peevishly returned to the subject of Angelica's tardiness.

"Ernest used to declare," said I, trying to divert his thoughts from dinner and dilatoriness, "that hearing Mrs. Fenton talk sounded very much like a person reading from Buchan's Domestic Medicine."

"Hush!" said Sir Brutus, "here comes Angelica at last. No: humph!—very curious. I never knew her so late before."

"Yes," said Miss Crockett, still endeavouring to divert his thoughts; "Ernest's remarks are very just: her last novelty is the 'Perennial Pill;' she became quite poetical about it on Wednesday."

"That is the stable clock striking the half-hour, I think," said Sir Brutus; "how very

strange this forgetfulness of Angelica's is. I am afraid something unpleasant must have happened. She is not ill surely? She has not complained of being unwell to-day, has she?"

"Now, my dear Sir Brutus," said Miss Crockett, "you really amuse me. Certainly Lady Bouverie is an exception to the general rule; her punctuality and regularity are amazing: yet she is *but* human, and may mistake the hour; her own watch may have gone wrong, or stopped, or a thousand little things may have occurred to delay her. Your astonishment, however, shows me how wonderfully punctual she must always be that a delay of half an hour, for once in a way, should positively alarm you."

"Solely on *her* account I assure you, Miss Crockett," replied Sir Brutus. "She is indeed a miracle: one of a thousand. She knows my, perhaps foolish, love of order and regularity, and has been good enough to *spoil* me by humouring it to the utmost. Indeed she spoils me in every-thing—everything;" continued Sir Brutus, showing more enthusiasm than he often allowed himself to evince; and which was the more surprising

when the circumstances were considered. "From the day of our marriage until now, I can conscientiously say that she has never needlessly contradicted or thoughtlessly annoyed me; she has studied my tastes, humoured my temper, and accommodated herself cheerfully to my habits. She has been the delight of my life, the ornament to my name, and the pride of my heart: never had a man a better wife, truer friend, or more charming companion. I speak thus freely to you both," said Sir Brutus, rather apologising for his unwonted warmth, "because I know you have loved her from your youth up, and are as pleased to hear her praised as I am to praise her."

"Fuss, go find your mistress, boy; hie! good dog. Seek her out; tell her we are waiting dinner."

Sir Brutus opened the door once more, and, in his unusual excitement, actually forgot to shut it again. Poor Sir Brutus! he seldom gave way to enthusiasm; so seldom indeed, that no one except his very great intimates gave him credit for any; Miss Crockett and myself were therefore as pleased as we were surprised at the frank

admission he had just made: indeed I was wondering what could have led him into such a train of thought and expression, when the solution followed.

"I would not have anyone to dinner to-day besides ourselves," continued he, "because as this is my *birthday*, I thought for once we should be happier as a quiet small family party: Miss Crockett I consider quite as one of the family."

Sir Brutus' birthday! and Angelica not to have even remotely hinted at that being the cause of our present meeting. His birthday! it had come upon us without our being prepared with one word of congratulation or token of remembrance.

We both felt guilty; I read it in Miss Crockett's face, and she was the more confounded by reason of the compliment Sir Brutus had paid her.

"What is the matter with that dog? here he is again. Is he going into a fit?"

Fuss's conduct certainly warranted the supposition, for after running round and round the room with his tongue out, uttering short barks, little dismal howls, and exhibiting every symptom

of canine alarm and distress, he ended by seizing me violently by the skirt, and pulling me with all the force yet remaining in his almost toothless jaws, towards the door.

"Fuss is as impatient as I am," observed Sir Brutus; "the old fellow knows his mistress is late, and does not approve of it at all: really, Sophie, I cannot help thinking something very unusual has detained your sister; such a delay never occurred before; she would surely have sent to say ——"

"Let me go and see what is the matter," said I, catching the infection of uneasiness, if not alarm; "in the meantime, Miss Crockett, do tell Sir Brutus about Eric's pictures."

On quitting the drawing-room, I remarked the butler in somewhat earnest conversation with two footmen.

"What is the matter, Crawford?" I asked, addressing the rather stately and picturesque old man. "Is anything wrong?"

"Oh, no, madam, nothing; I am only uncertain how to act: dinner has been ready a long time, and is getting cold. Sir Brutus is so very par-

ticular about hot soup; but still her ladyship is not in the drawing-room."

"Stay a moment longer, Crawford," said I; "I am going to call Lady Bouverie down. Possibly her watch has stopped, or something of that kind." I ran upstairs, poor old Fuss by my side.

The great staircase was lighted as usual, but the long gallery, into which the principal bedrooms opened, was comparatively dim. Over Angelica's door, which was at the very end, hung a lamp, a huge pink glass globe, which looked like a fiery ball in the surrounding gloom. Most of the doors in this gallery or corridor were either wide open or ajar; hers was closed. At the top of the stairs I met Marsh, her maid, who looked exceedingly astonished at seeing me.

"Bless me, Miss Denne, is that you? How you started me. What can be the matter, that you have left the dining-room?"

"I have not left the dining-room, Marsh; we have not gone into dinner yet: we are waiting for Lady Bouverie. Why doesn't she come down?"

"Come down, Miss," ejaculated the maid, look-

ing puzzled, "why surely she's gone down long ago: she's been dressed this half-hour."

"Where is she then?" I asked, becoming really alarmed.

"In her room, Miss: at least I left her there when she finished dressing. Look at the dog, Miss."

Again! the dog, again! What connection could Fuss's manner possibly have with Angelica's being late for dinner? And yet it suddenly became linked with it, and acquired the force of a presentiment.

Sick at heart, and shuddering at what I knew not, I mustered courage and walked firmly up the long gallery, but my breath came hot and fast as I approached the door of Angelica's room, which was closed, and had suddenly become invested with so much of mystery.

Fuss scratched, and snorted, and whined at it violently; no token of response, however, met the old favourite's greeting.

"She must have gone down, then, after all," I remarked, half unconsciously, as I reached the door; "and yet where can she have gone?"

With beating heart I knocked, and knocked again; I called her by name; no reply was

accorded ; I tried the door ; it was locked : locked ! why locked ? What significance attends the locking of a door ! how much mystery does that little act create !—what dread, what suspense, what agony, all by the turning of a key !

“Marsh,” said I, nervously, to the trembling maid, “the door is locked ; run at once for help : she must have fainted. Call Sir Brutus : tell Crawford to bring something to force the door with, and send for Sir James Carnegie and Dr. Blount.”

Away flew Marsh ; there was something in her step which made me fancy she was glad to increase the distance between herself and the door. A few moments only could have elapsed before help arrived, during which I listened eagerly, and thought more than once that I heard the leaves of a book being turned over ; I tried to call Angelica gently, but my heart beat so that I failed in the effort. And then I thought that perhaps I had acted precipitately, and that, after all, she might have been so fatigued with exercise and dressing that she had fallen asleep ; but if so, why was the door locked ?



Marsh's summons was instantly answered by a crowd of terrified servants trooping up the staircase, headed by Sir Brutus and Miss Crockett.

"What is this, Sophie?" cried my brother-in-law, rushing towards me.

"The door! the door!" I replied; "I cannot open the door;" and even in that second of time the terrible thought of what we *might* see when the door was opened flashed across my mind.

"Here, sir," exclaimed Crawford, arriving breathless with a tool-basket, "let me try: perhaps I can force back the lock;" and with trembling fingers the old man hunted among the odds and ends for some implement to pick it with.

"No, Crawford, no," shouted Sir Brutus, "there is no time for that; stand back, all of you: take up the dog; now, stand back;" and gathering his force for one tremendous effort, he flung his giant bulk and clenched fists against the panels, which creaked and split beneath his enormous strength and weight. Again and again he hurled himself against it, but with no avail. Miss Crockett having, during the suspense, recovered something

of her presence of mind, now rushed into the adjoining bed-room, and returning with a heavy poker thrust it into his torn and bleeding hands.

A few strokes of this homely but powerful instrument forced in sufficient of the panel to enable Crawford to insert his hand and unbolt the door. After all our frantic efforts and breathless anxiety to gain an entrance, there was a moment's pause before the boldest ventured to enter the chamber.

None of us perhaps could have defined precisely what it was that we so dreaded to see: vague misgivings, uncertain ghastly thoughts, perhaps death, perhaps catalepsy, perhaps sleep: and yet how could sleep be *possible* amid such a storm of blows and ejaculations?

On entering the room everything appeared to be in its usual order. Candles burned on the toilette table; all was peaceful, luxurious, and orderly. Amid the cushions of a large arm-chair there sat Angelica, before the dressing-table; her head had fallen back gently, her eyes were closed, her lips slightly parted. She was in evening costume, her rich silk robes spread around her; a costly jewel,

Sir Brutus' present on that very morning, flashed upon her breast. Alas ! its still lustre was unbroken by any beating of the heart below : save for her ominous paleness and pinched features, we might have thought she slept ; but never yet did sleep disguise itself beneath that deathlike aspect.

" Merciful God, what is all this ? " exclaimed Sir Brutus, seizing Angelica's hand.

" Sir Brutus," said Miss Crockett, " pray send the servants away, and let us relieve her of her dress and get her into bed."

While Sir Brutus ordered the room to be cleared, Miss Crockett and myself set to work to restore animation ; the application of eau de Cologne, smelling-salts, and the rubbing of her hands proving ineffectual, Sir Brutus rushed off for further stimulants. In the meantime, one sweep of Miss Crockett's penknife had cut every lace and string of my poor sister's dress. We wrapped her in a morning gown, and lifted her into bed. Yet stronger restoratives were administered, but in vain : not a tinge of colour from returning circulation rewarded our efforts.

Our only hope now rested upon the arrival of

the doctors. Suppose neither should be at home ! Our attention was suddenly arrested from tending Angelica by a sharp, short exclamation from Sir Brutus, who, aided by Marsh, was searching on the dressing-table for something (God knows what) to administer.

“Good heavens ! what can be the meaning of this ?” he exclaimed, at the same time holding up a small glass bottle labelled “Laudanum—Poison.” It was stopperless, and, though empty, still bore evident traces of having very recently been filled with that drug. “Merciful powers, what can this mean ?” gasped Sir Brutus, in a tone of extreme mental agony. “Where is the stopper ? Sophie, where is the stopper of this bottle ? What can be the meaning of all this mystery and horror ?”

I searched for a few moments, and found it among the cushions of the chair in which poor Angelica had sat.

At this juncture Sir James Carnegie arrived ; all that had been done seemed to meet with his approval. But I remember that an attempt was made on his part to get us to leave the room.

Be the worst what it might, we were resolved to know it; so, our very souls sickening with excess of apprehension, we stayed and watched his proceedings. A casual finger on the pulse, a hand passed over the heart, and a grave glance at Sir Brutus, were all the indications needed to reveal the truth.

Not a word was uttered; but, passing his arm within that of my brother-in-law, the doctor drew him out of the room, and they passed down stairs.

Miss Crockett and myself suspected the truth; although, when left alone, hoping against hope, and unwilling to give up all as lost, we silently continued to chafe the fast chilling hands and feet.

This agonizing operation was suddenly interrupted by the arrival of Dr. Blount, who, with that air of command sometimes assumed by the old medical friend of a family in cases of emergency, desired our immediate attendance on Sir Brutus in the drawing-room. *He* would do all that was necessary for Lady Bouverie.

All that was necessary! Yes, how little was needed now!—to compose her for the grave.

Under the pressure of excitement, and the bewilderment of despair, my mind became, as usual, microscopic. The brass stair-rods I remarked were larger than is usual in most houses, and the tips of the leaves in the iron scroll-work of the balustrades were gold—a fact I had not before noticed, for which I felt angry with myself.

Passing the dining-room, I saw the untouched birthday dinner still waiting.

Crawford, the only servant in the hall, silently ushered us into the drawing-room, and closed the door after us.

This apartment was almost in darkness; two wax tapers on the mantel-piece threw a dim watery reflection on the mirror, the fire had gone out, and the air felt chilly. Sir James Carnegie advanced to meet us; and, extending his hand, gave each of ours a very kind and gentle pressure, expressive at once of sympathy and protection. He then returned to Sir Brutus, who sat on the sofa in stony abstractedness, with Fuss in his

lap, looking eagerly into the cold, cavernous ashes of the fireless grate; perhaps finding therein an affinity with his own thoughts which a blazing hearth would not have afforded.

"This terrible visitation," observed Sir James Carnegie, after a painful pause—I felt that he was only going to tell us what we knew already but too well, still his manner was so gentle and feeling that I hoped he might be able to invest our misery with a milder aspect—"the distressing suddenness of this mournful event renders it necessary——" he was continuing, when Sir Brutus, in a voice hoarse, husky, paralytic—a voice so utterly changed that it was unrecognisable, a change from which for the rest of his life it never recovered—said—

"Sophie, it is better you should know the worst at once. Sir James Carnegie thinks it his duty to tell you that it has pleased—no—I mean—thinks it better to inform you that, from the suddenness of this most awful—event—a judicial inquiry—a—a—a—coroner's inquest must necessarily be held."

A coroner's inquest! I had heard vaguely of

such inquiries: I had seen notices in the newspapers of such investigations; but they were almost always connected with misery, want, ignorance, or sudden deaths the result of frightful accidents. What possible connection could such a proceeding have with poor Angelica and her luxurious home at Freshfield?

Then, whilst occupied with these melancholy surmises, came stealing over my memory those heart-rending lines of poor Hood—

“Glad to death’s mystery  
Swift to be hurled,  
Anywhere, anywhere,  
Out of the world.”

The moon shone brightly on that harrowing night: pale, placid moon, mother of thought, parent of high imaginings. While on her silent course across the heavens, what aching hearts and sleepless eyes watched her slow passage from the windows at Freshfield!

A proud and reserved nature, suddenly thrown back upon itself, deprived of the one sole object of its love, its confidence, and its pride.

A sister, left to mourn the loss of one more loving heart and kindred tie.



How fast was that once wide circle narrowing, which but a few short years since had left their wild outlandish dwelling "in that kingdom by the sea !"

The mists of earth had risen, enveloping man and all his misery in haze and obscurity ; but the glorious vault of heaven showed clear and blue, until the wondering eye almost presumed to penetrate the mystery of space.

Dear, dead Angelica ! where, amid that starry vastness, was your spirit wandering ?

Then those words of consolation came gently to my memory, " In my Father's house are many mansions ; "—then, at last, I slept.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## DE PROFUNDIS.

"The face that in the morning sun  
 We thought so wondrous fair,  
 Hath faded, ere its course was run,  
 Beneath its golden hair.

\* \* \* \*

But not where the death prayer is said  
 The life of life departs :  
 The body in the grave is laid,  
 The beauty in our hearts."

WILSON.

DREAD at the thought of leaving my room, dread of meeting Sir Brutus, seized me in the morning, and I turned to the prospect of communion with Miss Crockett with gladness. Her practical mind and strong sense were pillars of support against which I could recline fearlessly.

"Has Sir Brutus left his room yet, Marsh?"  
 I inquired of the maid, who pale, and with eyes

red with weeping, came to assist me in dressing.

"Yes, Miss ; Sir Brutus has been down a long time, and has gone out."

"Out ! Marsh ; why, where can he have gone ?"

"I don't know, Miss, I am sure ; he is about the grounds somewhere, I suppose."

"Is Miss Crockett up ?"

"Yes, Miss ; she is nearly dressed : I offered to help her, but she said she did not want any help."

"Well, go and ask if I can speak to her."

"Miss Crockett will be glad to see you as soon as you are ready," was the speedy answer.

Concluding a hasty toilette, I hastened to Jenny Wren's room, where I found her busily occupied in writing notes to all Sir Brutus' friends, telling them of what had happened.

"My dear," said she, "nothing offends me so much as to receive lithographed intimations of a misery of this kind ; that is why I am writing these notes."

"Sir Brutus has gone out, dear Miss Crockett,"

I remarked; "where can he have gone? I dread to think what he may do."

"You dread that he will make away with himself, my dear, I suppose."

"Yes, Miss Crockett, I do dread it; the thought has crossed my mind."

"There is no fear of that," was her reply; "he is too strong-minded. It is far more likely that he has gone off to his attorney about altering his will, before the world is awake to notice him: something he let drop in conversation last night makes me think so."

"Alter his will! what, already, Miss Crockett?"

"Yes, my dear; Sir Brutus is just the man to do so; or he may have gone to inquire when the coroner's inquest will be held: in all cases of sudden death, a coroner's inquest must be held."

"What! here? Will they come here to *see* Angelica?—how horrible!"

"Yes, my dear; it must be done: they must *see* her."

"Have you written to poor Uncle Edward, Miss Crockett?"

"I am writing now to break the news to him as

well as I can," was the reply; "but it is very difficult, and most painful: better perhaps that I should do so than you."

"You are indeed a friend: I could not do it. *Must we go down to breakfast?*"

"Certainly, my love, certainly; however little consolation our conversation may afford Sir Brutus, our presence will be some relief to him: perhaps he may wish to advise with us as to the future."

Having finished her notes, we descended together, and found Sir Brutus sitting before the fire with a newspaper in his hands, apparently engaged in reading the births, deaths, and marriages. He at once placed the paper on the table and arose to greet us, extending his hand, which trembled exceedingly, at the same time begging us, in a fearfully husky voice, to be seated.

Miss Crockett immediately placed herself in poor Angelica's vacant chair, and spoke cheerfully in reply, but I found it impossible to articulate one word.

Sir Brutus, however, kissed me kindly; it was the first, and I believe the last kiss, he ever gave

to any of our family, his poor dead wife excepted.

"I have been out this morning already," he observed: "in the midst of health and vigour we are in death; I know not who may next be summoned; I have therefore been to my attorney to give him directions as to the arrangement of my affairs, and to make inquiry also as to the investigation which is to take place according to law."

All this was said firmly, clearly, calmly, and without a pause, as by one who had resolved to act a bold, brave part, despite the agony it cost him.

"Sophie," said he, "you will take everything that was Angelica's, except the necklace I gave her only yesterday at this time; that is to remain with me. You will distribute the things as you think she would have wished, had she been spared time to have done so herself. Miss Crockett," he continued, "you will, I am sure, take charge of my house for the present: I shall consider it an act of great kindness in you to do so."

"Certainly, Sir Brutus; I am glad to be of any

service, however small, and I have ventured to write several notes this morning."

"That is very good of you, Miss Crockett; very thoughtful of you: I had quite forgotten that."

How different is the effect of sorrow upon different minds. I could not eat: I doubt if I could have raised a cup to my lips; while Sir Brutus ate voraciously, and then retired to his library.

"You see," said Miss Crockett, "I was not mistaken as to Sir Brutus' object in going out so early this morning."

"Yes; but, my dear friend, it seems very strange, does it not, to remember such things at such a time? I could not have done so, even if I had thought of it."

"My dear, I judged Sir Brutus by myself: it is exactly what I should have done, or have wished to do under similar circumstances, and I misread your character very much if you would not have done the same. There is nothing repugnant to the deepest feeling in this: a month hence it might be impossible, but at present the blow has stunned his heart rather than bewildered his judgment. He felt that he

ought to set his house in order, and he has done so promptly, and without concealment or pretence.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You had better not leave your room until I send for you, my dear," said Miss Crockett, as she came to me, where I was sitting in moody abstraction, thinking of all the terrors that had happened, and wondering what would next befall us and who might next be summoned away.

"Oh! Miss Crockett," I inquired, suddenly starting up, "what has happened? do, pray, tell me!"

"Nothing, my dear, has happened; but the inquest will be held shortly, and unless you remain quiet here you might perhaps meet the men upon the stairs. I will attend to everything."

This announcement only seemed to render my sense of hearing instantly more acute. "The men on the stairs!" I remembered how the men had moved about the house in Park Lane when my poor mother was carried to her grave. Pre-



sently there was a ring at the hall bell, then a stealthy treading of many feet, and a suppressed whisper or two as they passed on towards poor Angelica's room, and then a long pause.

I tried to shut out all sounds, all sense of what was around me; and though I partially succeeded, the thought would keep recurring of what she would feel if she could know to what she was subjected. I raised my head, which I had buried in the pillows of my couch; all was silent: all was over. I sprang up: I would go to Miss Crockett; nay, I must go to *her*: I could not bear to think she was *alone*; that I should never behold her sweet face again. I half opened my door, when the murmur of distant voices reached me, and I shrank back involuntarily, as *her* door—the closed door at which we had waited so long and listened so anxiously—opened.

The low hum of whispering voices again became audible and passed by me, then died away. A faint echo of distant footfalls succeeded; the hall door was shut—all was silence; one moment more, and with a rustling of silk, and a quick

pattering of feet, Miss Crockett rushed into the room.

"It is all over! Thank God, it is all over: they are gone." She was very pale, and spoke as if out of breath; her eyes, too, had a strange wild expression, so different to their usually clear, quick aspect.

"Dear Miss Crockett, what have they done?"

"Done, my dear child, they have done nothing; at least nothing but their painful duty. They have seen her, of course."

Here, for the first time during this fierce trial, did poor Jenny Wren lose her nerve; she cried bitterly.

I silently gave her the glass of camphor julep which had been poured out for myself; she swallowed it without remonstrance. This restored her calmness, and again I spoke: "What did they say, dear Miss Crockett?"

"They concluded, my love, that it had pleased God to take your dear sister, and that her death was the result of her accidentally swallowing an overdose of laudanum."

"Then there was a doubt, Miss Crockett?"

They doubted whether she had not killed herself, did they?"

"My love, I did not dare to tell you so; but there *was* a doubt. It was a case of sudden death, and it was for a jury to say how it happened. They have now done so, and their verdict is 'Accidental Death:' thank Heaven for it!"

It seemed strange to me to echo her words as applied to my own dear sister, but I did so fervently: "Accidental death!" Thank Heaven, indeed, for accidental death!

\* \* \* \* \*

Painful in point of penmanship and its tone of bereavement was poor uncle Edward's reply to Miss Crockett's note. The once bold round hand was gone, and in its place a ragged scrawl full of blots and erasures. He was wholly unable to move from the house, and equally unable to bear the shock or exertion of attending Angelica's last obsequies.

Otho was away on business, no one knew exactly where, on the Continent. Ernest was with his uncle Harcourt, who was pronounced to be dying.

Death! death! death—nothing but death on all sides.

“Miss Crockett,” said I, “I am resolved to go to the funeral. I must go. I must see Angelica laid in the grave: she would have followed me to mine, I know. A Denne to be borne to the grave and no Denne to follow the bier! I *must* and *will* go.”

I fully expected a remonstrance, and was greatly surprised to meet with her approval and encouragement.

“My dear child,” she replied, “you are quite right: I entirely approve of your resolve, and I also intend to go. Sir Brutus has, for some reason, abstained from inviting one person to the funeral; this he has told me, and I am sure he will be gratified when I tell him of our decision: although he intended to go through the whole ordeal unaided, yet it will be balm to his stricken heart. Besides, as her sister, it will be no more than proper.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The church was hung with black; the whole county seemed assembled, also in mourning, to

attend her to the grave: the sight was startling, touching, and appalling.

During the long sickening drive, no word was spoken by either of the three of us. Arrived at the church, Sir Brutus descended the carriage steps and handed us out, then strode forward alone, as though no human aid should help him. In a new vault they laid her down: she the eldest, the brightest, the highest raised of all the three, gone first down there.

No amen, no sigh, no raised handkerchief, as ashes mingled with ashes: those dread words which usually excite ungovernable emotion in the hardest heart. No; Sir Brutus was beyond the reach of the power of words: dead to every sense; blind to all save the form of her whom he would fain see through wood, through lead, and grave clothes. One hoarse cough he gave as we turned away; and, raising my eyes upon him, I saw just beyond, the sorrowing face of dear old Ben Jermin.

We re-entered the carriage. One pressure of his hand to each of us, as if in recognition of a service rendered, one glance at the sea of heads,

and Sir Brutus closed the window; as though with that act he would exclude all this world's cold distraction, and struggle as best he could with the torturing conflict of an isolated spirit.

A voice which betrayed an attempt at ghastly jocularly, saying "Ah! Fuss, old fellow, is that you?" recalled me to myself.

We had returned once more to Freshfield; the little animal came out evidently to greet his mistress as usual, for he refused Sir Brutus' proffered caress, and with eager glance sought another recognition.

"No, Fuss, no; not there, not there, boy: gone, gone: Never again!" cried his poor master, who read the mute inquiry in the dog's wistful eyes as plainly as I did myself; then seizing the little creature in his arms, he rushed off with it to his own room.

How often, in after years, did those sorrowful syllables resound through the chambers of my brain. At the moment, my own anguish scarce found room to assert itself in the presence of the far mightier misery of the master of Freshfield. His agony was so intense, so silent, and

oppressive, that I was half-distracted by watching every fresh phase it assumed. But when all was over, and my throbbing heart could expand itself in silence and solitude, poor Sir Brutus' exclamation of "Gone, gone: never again!" always came back like the "for ever, never," of the poet's timepiece, with mournful monotony on brain and ear, as the fitting epilogue to this disastrous drama.

\* \* \* \*

Sir Brutus' request that we would remain with him until he made arrangements for leaving Freshfield, was not to be refused. Sad indeed were the last few weeks we passed within those walls; although he strove hard to render them less oppressive, and we seconded his efforts to our utmost.

By degrees, everything, even to the gilding on the balustrades, was enveloped in wrappers, until there was scarce an object left upon which the memory could for a moment dwell. Servants were discharged, with the exception of one or two to take charge of the house; horses, carriages, harness, all were sold.

The day for our departure came at last, and we resolved to quit the house together. Miss Crockett and myself were to be deposited at Redleaf, whence Sir Brutus was to prosecute his journey to the coast alone, attended only by Crawford.

As the lodge-gates closed and clanged after us, Sir Brutus slowly remarked :

“ Yes ; windows, doors, gates, everything closed : the grave is also closed, and so is the gate of happiness in this world for me. Poor Freshfield ! how long it waited for its mistress, how soon it lost her ! Those chimneys : look, Sophie, you now can see the last glimpse of them ; when will they smoke again ?—never, never more for me or mine. You will promise, if possible, to make a pilgrimage to this spot once a year, and to—to—where *she* lies. Miss Crockett will bear you company, I am sure. You will sometimes go and see that all is in order, as she would have kept all for me.” Here his voice failed him, and we could but falter incoherent assurances ; but my heart said, “ Surely, yes, surely, I will go.”

“ Here is Redleaf at last,” remarked Miss Crockett.



“Yes, here it is,” said Sir Brutus, with a deep-drawn sigh, “and here end your many troubles on my account; for which you both have my heartfelt thanks—thanks which words cannot, will not utter. Blessings on you both; you have been staunch friends. God reward you for all you have been to me, and to what *was* mine—ours. Kiss poor Fuss, Sophie; you see he looks for a kiss: he is to be my friend and travelling companion, you know. If you have ever need of me, I will not say with what heartfelt gratitude I shall serve you. Write to me under any circumstances: I will send you an address which will always find me. Now farewell, dear Miss Crockett; farewell, dear Sophie, too; God bless you both! good bye. Remember that I have not forgotten Louis Grey, although I have said but little about him.”

Slowly he closed the carriage window, and, with eyes swimming with tears, we saw the last of Sir Brutus Bouverie.

He died at Florence within the year, broken-hearted. His remains, brought home quietly by Crawford at his own desire, were privately and

unostentatiously laid beside those of his wife Angelica.

That evening I spent beneath the thatched roof of the "Wren's Nest;" next day I returned to Daundelyonn.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOME, SAD HOME.

"Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,  
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,  
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

\* \* \* \*

But some they have died, and some they have left me,  
And some are taken from me; all are departed;  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces!"

CHARLES LAMB.

Who has not experienced the contending emotions, the mixed feelings of pleasure and regret, which assail the heart and spirits on once more returning home after a long absence?—the delight at any little improvements, the dread of any painful changes, the excitement of the first few hours, the disagreeable reaction which inevitably follows, the regret that our wanderings are over, the joy at once more being surrounded by familiar objects; above all, the difficulty—the almost impossibility—

of "settling down" into the old ways and habits, after a protracted change of scene and occupation. I never felt these emotions more strongly than on my present return to Daundelyonn, after visiting Whirlingham and Freshfield. But, alas! the little pleasure I could extract from witnessing the joy of the Twins and Phœbe Sackett at my reappearance among them, was more than neutralized by observing the grievous change which had taken place in everything and everybody about me.

I could scarcely believe that this was the Daundelyonn of former years. Was this the Daundelyonn, the great show-house, and curiosity-shop of the small neighbourhood? Could this mournful and deserted mansion have been the bright sunny scene of my childish freaks and frolics?—the happy home which my sisters had quitted with so much regret?—the enchanted castle where, by the sparkling water of the marble fountain, I had listened to a voice of almost more than mortal sweetness? How many visions of former years passed before me, like slides in the magic lantern of memory! I saw the ancient terrace with its broad granite steps, its grassy slopes of intensest green, on which

reposed the golden glow of sunshine. I saw a tall and stately child amusing herself by flinging crumbs of bread to the peacocks, in the vain hope of discomposing their dignity of demeanour. Again I busied myself with watching the gambols of a fair and fragile figure, which, with golden hair floating freely in the breeze and white arms outstretched, was chasing her own shadow over the velvet turf, with all the unconscious grace and playfulness of a kitten; watched eagerly, as she flitted to and fro, by the large dark admiring eyes of a big gipsey-like boy, and all unconscious of the glances cast upon her by the bright black orbs of an elegant looking lady all glistening with jet beads and bugles, and by a tall and gaunt figure in blue spectacles who led in either hand a trim and trembling Twin.

Once more I saw the conservatory, a very wreath and bower of sweet scented flowers around a plashing fountain; I bent over its marble brim, and from its depths beheld a pale earnest face with deep shadowy eyes gazing steadfastly upon me: eyes which I feared, yet almost hoped, I might never meet again. I was in the bower-chamber

now, listening to Mademoiselle's noisy sonatas, while endeavouring to decipher one of Edwy's hieroglyphic despatches; who, in trouble as usual, had written to Uncle Edward for ten pounds, as a birthday present, on the occasion of attaining the mature age of fifteen; to which was added by way of postscript, in very plain terms, but infamous spelling:—"If this assistance is refused I shall be driven to despare, as I have a debt of honour which must be met, or I am a disgrased man for life."

I was once more in Eric's studio, aiding Count Max to form picturesque effects for my cousin's endless sketches;—Max who was never tired of playing Romeo to my Juliet, Frithiof to my Ingebore, Charlemagne to my Fastrada: at which I wondered then, blind beetle that I was.

"All, all were gone, the old familiar faces."

Again I saw Florence stroll through the avenue, her blushing face half hidden by her broad-plumed hat, while Louis Grey poured into her delighted ear his whispered lessons of love and of religion. Again I saw Angelica, sweet soul, glowing with



youth and health, spring upon her favourite Arab, and followed by Harold, his whole heart's fervent idolatry burning in his wild dark eyes, gallop boldly down the avenue, and disappear from view, as the great gates clanged behind them. Could that graceful stately child, basking in the sun—that blushing, blooming girl—be the fallow, slovenly, careworn matron of High Street, Whirlingham? Could that fairy-like being, dancing with her own shadow in the very wantonness of gaiety—that fearless, heedless Amazon, wild with the exuberance of youth, health, and happiness—be the cold and stately Lady Bouverie of Freshfield? could those light, graceful limbs, and lovely face, be the wasted rigid form, the pinched distorted features I had so lately seen, decked out in all the ghastly apparel of the grave?

With a breaking heart I looked around me: an air of desolation and neglect hung over everything. Buried in the cushions of an easy chair, crouched a pale, thin, sickly, bent old man, whose huge bones and breadth of frame, on which the skin hung loose and wrinkled, rendered his attenuation only the more fearfully apparent. Could that great

gaunt haggard-looking, blear-eyed skeleton, be my once rosy, portly, stalwart Uncle Edward?

"Soph," said a cracked, feeble, tremulous voice. "Soph, my dear child, we are glad to get you home again: home again, Soph; though you are changed too, dear. But all is changed, I think: all sadly changed; or so it seems to me. Well, well, well, it's all for the best, all for the best; we must never forget that all is for the best. Hilda, Elfrida, Sophie, remember always, that all is for the best."

Alas! alas! the words were Uncle Edward's, but the voice, the spirit, — where was the hopeful smile, the firm cheerful tone that would once have accompanied them? — alas, alas! I looked at Hilda and Elfrida; side by side on a low sofa and cowering over the flickering fire, there sat the two little shivering, shrunken figures, who looked twenty years older than when last I saw them.

Never beautiful, they had owed what little attraction they once possessed to the mere bloom and sparkle of youth; that *beauté du diable* from which almost every girl, however homely featured,



gains some little prettiness: their pink cheeks, luxuriant ringlets, and bright black bead-like eyes had been set off, as well as their small, square, formal figures, by all the care and taste which poor Aunt Barbara could lavish upon them; when, as yet untouched by care or oppressed by sorrow, and adorned by exquisite and becoming dresses, their faces and forms had boasted some small share of what might pass for beauty, of a low order it is true, but still sufficiently attractive to win them the tribute of being called "rather pretty girls."

What a change had here again been wrought! Wan, withered, anxious-looking beings, nipped and spare in form, angular, sharp, and bony, there as they sat with their glittering quick eyes, chattering teeth, and pale faces, they reminded me more of two elderly chimpanzee monkeys huddled together with the vain hope of keeping each other warm, than of two pretty little Dutch dolls, which they certainly once resembled.

For the rest, where were they? Where the merry playful party which used to assemble round that blazing hearth?

Harold, a fugitive, a self exile, a nameless wanderer—a rough, uncouth, uncivilized outcast, herding with the very dregs and scum of the earth.

Edwy, far away upon the wild and “desolate rainy seas.”

Eric, he was a brighter spot in the picture of desolation; but yet he was an exile from his home, too. And that home itself: where was the neatness, the order, the social cheerfulness, the air of comfort, cleanliness, and regularity, which like an atmosphere once pervaded all parts of the house; the taste, the elegance, the brilliant flowers, the sweet perfumes, which greeted one on every side?

Gone, all gone!—buried with Aunt Barbara in the family mausoleum, banished with Eric to the marble palaces of Italy, or withering with poor Florence in the smoke and din of Whirlingham.

“Sophie,” said the tremulous voice of the old man by the fire, “I have not been out since I heard of it. I could not face the condolences of my neighbours; but an effort must be made: I shall go out to-morrow. I have business which admits of no delay—and I must go.”

"May I not go with you?" I asked; "or can I not go for you?"

"No, my love, thank you—no; I must go, and go alone. I must meet my lawyer in Canterbury, and I shall not be home till dinner-time."

I could not bear the thought of his going out alone; some excuse must be made to prevent it: at last a happy thought struck me. "You will pass Miss Crockett's gate, dear uncle, why not take Hilda and Elfrida with you, and leave them with her, calling for them on your return? they have not seen our dear little friend for so long, it would please her so much to have them."

"As you like, my dear, as you like; but to Canterbury I must go, and go alone: I'll leave them at Miss Crockett's, with pleasure."

A long dreary evening followed this conversation: the contrast between our old active habits and the present forlorn listlessness was too terrible to be endured.

Hilda and Elfrida sat with their hands before them, glancing at the clock and occasionally whispering to each other; Uncle Edward alternately dozing and staring at the fire.

I determined upon making an effort to infuse some little life into our narrow circle.

"Have you no work to do, no needle-work in hand? Surely there must be plenty in the house," said I.

"No; we have nothing to do," Hilda replied, rather regretfully; "we have finished our last piece of embroidery, and have no materials for a new one, they are so expensive."

"Why not do something useful by way of a change?" said I.

"We don't know how," cried Elfrida.

"Then it is quite time to learn, so let us begin at once. What is there in the house of plain needle-work? Let us ask Phoebe." So, ringing the bell, the question was soon answered.

"Nothing to make, but plenty to mend, Miss," said Phoebe.

"Well, then, bring down some of the things which most need repair, and let us set to work."

A large basketful soon made its appearance, and we were as speedily lost amid a pile of linen, calico, muslin, tapes, buttons, and bobbin.

The Twins being fairly launched upon the ti-

of occupation, my next care was Uncle Edward ; what was to be done with him ? To leave him to the miserable ponderings of his own thoughts must not be, and yet it was very difficult to make myself a self-inducted participator in them. I suddenly bethought me of Eric's advice, as to plunging at once into the midst of an unpleasant subject ; and so without giving myself time for reflection, I started upon the theme which I felt must be uppermost in his mind.

" You must have been terribly shocked to hear about poor Angelica, dear uncle ; such a fearfully sudden death ! "

Uncle Edward started as though a cannon had been fired off close to his ear. It was evident that the subject of the Freshfield tragedy had been tacitly tabooed at Daundelyonn.

" It was awfully sudden," I continued, under the conviction that the silence and mystery which had been maintained upon this subject only tended to increase its horror, " awfully sudden ! Poor Sir Brutus, I fear he will never recover the shock ; and much as he was devoted to dear Angelica, and deeply as he has felt her death,

I believe that the harrowing publicity of an inquest has affected him still more strongly."

"My dear Sophie," and here my uncle positively gasped for breath, "how can you bear to mention such a subject? We have never ventured to speak of it *here*."

"Why not?" I asked, gently.

"Why not, my dear? You astonish me by asking such a question. So distressing a theme should not surely be discussed in public."

"In public!" I answered, at the same time throwing a glance round the almost empty room; "in public! no, but here among ourselves only."

"My dear child," cried Uncle Edward: "it was a most dreadful—a most distressing visitation: such subjects will not bear talking about."

"True," I replied, "with no interchange of sympathy or comfort, with no friendly tongue to breathe pity or consolation; but, oh, Uncle Edward, here, here in our own sadly narrowed circle, is it not better to speak freely of our sorrows and trials, than to bear the burden of them unaided and unaiding; denying ourselves

the sweet balm of family counsel and sympathy, denying to each other the sweetest pleasure the world can give—the pleasure of consoling those we love?”

“Sophie,” said Uncle Edward, after a pause, “I believe you are right; we have been mistaken in avoiding all conversation about the event at Freshfield. My judgment is weaker, Soph, weaker every day: I grow childish, my love, and need stronger crutches to lean upon than those two poor children can ever be to me, God bless and help them. Eric is a good son, Sophie, a good son,” continued the old man, gradually letting his imprisoned feelings loose from their cell; “a good, kind, generous heart; I never did him justice: never, Sophie. But, Harold! oh, my boy, my poor, poor boy, where is he? What will he say, what will he do, when all this horror comes to his knowledge?”

I thought the present a good opportunity for telling him of what Miss Crockett’s cousin had reported. Even that scrap of uncertain intelligence was hailed as “good news” by the desolate father. I next ventured to tell him the substance

of Eric's letter, and so gradually led him on to listen to the account of poor Angelica's death, softening the circumstances as far as truth would allow. I felt more and more certain that familiarity with the subject would lessen its horrors, and the result proved that I was not mistaken. I disabused his mind of the dreadful impression, which, in spite of the verdict, I saw was still lurking there, that any idea of suicide could be entertained for a moment. I took down a volume of the "Opium-eater," and showed him what enormous quantities of laudanum might be taken by those habituated to its use. I dwelt on the deposition made by Marsh, as to the incredible number of bottles bearing labels "Laudanum—Poison," which she had from time to time removed from her mistress' room, thereby showing how little secrecy had been observed by Angelica in its use. By such arguments I won my poor uncle over to look upon the whole affair as an ordination of Providence—a sad and irreparable loss—rather than as a grim and ghastly tragedy.

I thankfully observed that the ordeal of this next day's journey to Canterbury was robbed



half its terrors, and the evening had passed swiftly, if mournfully. But besides this I had the satisfaction of feeling that I had succeeded in establishing a confidence, a reliance on my judgment, for which, since the death of Aunt Barbara, he had unconsciously pined.

"God bless you, my children, and good night," said Uncle Edward, with a sigh, as he took up his candle to retire to bed. "God bless you, Sophie; I feel easier to-night than I have done for months, I might almost say years."

"Good night, Phoebe," said I, cheerfully, when she came to take the Twins off to bed, as though they had been "the children" as of old: "your master will go to Canterbury early to-morrow, and the young ladies will accompany him as far as Miss Crockett's; I shall remain and help you to put things a little to rights."

"The Lord be thanked for your coming back, Miss; the young ladies, (the Twins were always to be young,) and master too, wanted something to wind them up, run down like a clock they was: we was all getting stagnated with the miserables, and no wonder; but now you're come back, Miss

Sophie, we shall be all right again, and Dandelion will be old Dandelion once more."

"Well, Phœbe, let us see what can be done," I replied, with an attempt at cheerfulness; but Sir Brutus' words, "Gone, gone, never again," found a sad response in the echo of my own convictions.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## STOPPED PAYMENT.

"Pecuniary embarrassment is the identical species of adversity that is the touchstone of all dispositions. Beauty and ability, relationship, nay, every connection shakes when the ensign of poverty is unfurled."—*Laconism*.

I WENT to bed that night with a heavy heart; for it was no pleasant reflection that, beyond condolence and assisting in the curtailment of expense, I was powerless to help Uncle Edward and the Twins. He had greatly desired to share among my brothers and sisters and myself the trifle of patrimony we possessed, and which he had carefully husbanded; but to this we had all positively refused to consent: so long as he lived we determined that he should control it, both for his own benefit and ours.

The boys had both freely given up their pittance to us. Sir Brutus had declined to re-

ceive Angelica's portion on her marriage; and yet, even with this liberality on their parts, Florence and I had scarcely two hundred and twenty pounds a year left.

She, with her increasing family, required all we could spare to enable her and Louis, whose income barely reached four hundred a year, to keep their heads above water; so that the trifle which remained as my share did but little towards aiding Uncle Edward in his declining years.

These anxieties, and the thousand minor ones which spring up like fungi around a great evil, kept me awake so late, that Uncle Edward and the Twins had gone long before I got downstairs next morning.

Taking Phœbe into council, I planned such arrangements as seemed best for promoting the general comfort and economy.

The numerous staff of servants had already been reduced to Phœbe herself and an under-housemaid, who, on account of her talent for gastronomy, had been promoted to the office of cook.

In the grounds Ben Jermin now reigns

supreme over all that was not "let off," aided by dull Billy as second in command; between them were divided the duties of opening and shutting the great gates, gardening, grooming our sole remaining horse, the once celebrated Sir Toby: Aunt Barbara's pony, having been superannuated and "turned out," was not to be taken into consideration.

The forcing-houses, most of the kitchen garden, and orchard, were "let" to a neighbouring market-gardener, so that the out-door expenses had also been reduced within possible limits; yet, with even this cutting and paring, it required all our skill and economy not to exceed our terribly crippled means.

Among the manifold rocks and shoals attending the first essay in our housekeeping, none was more difficult to control or guard against than the incumbrance of being overhoused. Irrespective of the expense attending the keeping rooms aired which were never used, and the natural decay of wood, paint, and paper, the knowledge that Mr. Denne had plenty of spare room frequently induced visits from people who heeded little and

cared still less about our reduced circumstances, and only thought of spending a pleasant day at Daundelyonn, sure of a hospitable welcome and an invitation to spend the night under its roof. This, of course, entailed the necessity for an extra dish or two, a breakfast in the morning, and perhaps luncheon.

Still I did my best, and battled bravely with Uncle Edward against his ill-timed hospitality. The overtasked Phoebe found in me a willing if not a very able coadjutor, in sweeping the rooms, making beds, and the numerous little domestic arrangements required to keep the appearance of poverty away from Uncle Edward's eyes.

Nor was I without reward while making these efforts; for I learned more about the price of food, washing, and general household expenditure, than I should ever have discovered under other circumstances; and this afterwards proved most useful to me. In the present instance, after arranging Uncle Edward's bedroom, and placing a few fresh flowers on his dressing-table, I descended to the regions below; where, armed with a pair of riding-gloves, and clad in one of Phoebe's

of occupation, my next care was Uncle Edward ; what was to be done with him ? To leave him to the miserable ponderings of his own thoughts must not be, and yet it was very difficult to make myself a self-inducted participator in them. I suddenly bethought me of Eric's advice, as to plunging at once into the midst of an unpleasant subject ; and so without giving myself time for reflection, I started upon the theme which I felt must be uppermost in his mind.

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"My dear Sophie," and here my uncle positively gasped for breath, "how can you bear to mention such a subject? We have never ventured to speak of it *here*."

"Why not?" I asked, gently.

"Why not, my dear? You astonish me by asking such a question. So distressing a theme should not surely be discussed in public."

"In public!" I answered, at the same time throwing a glance round the almost empty room; "in public! no, but here among ourselves only."

"My dear child," cried Uncle Edward: "it was a most dreadful—a most distressing visitation: such subjects will not bear talking about."

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the orchard in quest of plunder; and yet the general configuration of the intruder was totally unlike that of a vagrant, his carriage was too erect for a mendicant. Although his features were undistinguishable, in consequence of his standing with his back to the last faint gleam of light on the horizon, I saw enough to convince me that the intruder wore neither rags nor tatters, but, on the contrary, a kind of uniform, for the glitter of gold lace was evident.

At this moment Phoebe entered with a light; and its rays falling full upon the face, I saw, to my intense horror and amazement, that it was Edwy! Edwy, looking ill, pale, ghastly, haggard, and wet through; his eyes half starting from their sockets, his dress disordered, his hair dank and dishevelled upon his miserable sunken cheek.

Turning with a motion to Phoebe to be silent, I again reverted to the window, but he was gone!

"Phoebe," I remarked, "Mr. Edwy has returned; let us go round to the front door and let him in."

"Mr. Edwy, Ma'am! Bless us! is he expected? I never heard tell that he was coming."

"Nor I, Phœbe; but there he stood at the window, and so let us be off and welcome him."

Away we went, but no one was there: no trace of any one within range of our glimmering light.

"Lawk! Miss, I see no one. You must have been dreaming."

"No, Phœbe, it was no dream," said I: "but say nothing of this to the young ladies, nor indeed to anyone."

Had this been the first time on which a form had appeared to me at an unwonted moment, I might possibly have discredited the evidence of my senses. But, alas! the recollection of Aunt Barbara at the Castle Mona came back too circumstantially to admit of my sheltering myself behind a doubt. No, no! again the veil between the seen and the unseen had been raised; time and space had been annihilated. Edwy was dead: this I knew; perhaps a few days would reveal the fact. Sorrow upon sorrow!

The return of dinner stayed the sad current of my thoughts. Oh! wearisome, trying, but beneficial detail of daily life! Blessed necessity for action, without which the over-wrought brain would shiver beneath the pressure of calamity, or start aside like a broken bow, and snap in idiocy.

The adventures of the day sufficed to entertain the Twins; with an occasional remark from myself, by way of starting them off again when they came to a pause.

Ten o'clock struck; when, feeling convinced that Uncle Edward had remained in Canterbury for the night, I was glad to plead fatigue as an excuse for retiring; so summoning Phœbe with bed candles, I bade her take the young ladies off at once, as her master would certainly not return so late as ten o'clock.

"Master be gone to bed, Miss," was the reply.

"Gone to bed, Phœbe! Why! when did he come home?"

"He have been home a long time, Miss; he went straight upstairs, and said I wasn't to say any-

thing about it, as he were very tired, and would go to bed to 'onst."

Never in the whole course of his life had Uncle Edward done this before; and, considering his state of health, it startled me exceedingly. Visions of finding his *door locked* in the morning, and fears of a repetition of all that had happened at Freshfield, flitted like spectres before my mind's eye. The Twins housed for the night, I strolled to his door; and, listening with breathless anxiety, thankfully heard his tranquil breathing.

Sorrow upon sorrow, care upon care, had so prostrated every energy that I was unable even to summon up Edwy's face at the window pane; but with the effort to do so I fell asleep.

In the morning, a summons from Uncle Edward brought me into his dressing-room; I was about to scold him for the trick he had played me overnight, but a strange expression in his face prevented it.

"You must have been astonished at my going to bed so sulkily, last night, my dear," said he; "but I was completely knocked up and unmanned by the news I had heard at Canterbury, and I felt so ill

and worn out that I thought bed was the best place for me."

"What news, dear uncle?" I inquired.

"My love, the bank has broken: only the bank broken, that is all—but it is the worst evil that could now happen, excepting the loss of yet more of you. What little I had there is gone, and what little balance of interest which belonged to you is gone too, of course. The Manager, who is under deep obligations to me, vowed, when I told him of the rumours afloat about its stability, that there was no foundation for the report, and that it was doubtless set on foot by some enemy of the establishment; although he must have known full well that it was then on its last legs. There is no faith in man: nothing but black ingratitude and deceit."

"The bank broken! Dear Uncle Edward, what is to be done?" And then everything faded away from my mind in the wild vague dreads which seized me.

By continuing his conversation with forced calmness, he brought me somewhat to myself.

"Sophie," said he, "I thought to have lived

and died at Daundelyonn as my forefathers have done for ages, but I have now no hope of that; these repeated shocks are fast killing me, and it is but right that you should know all about our exact position. The principal of the money your poor father left you is safe: that has never been touched; and so is that of your brother's. Florence's share was handed over to Mr. Grey, and settled on her marriage. My own property is all mortgaged and forestalled to the last penny; all that now remains to live upon is the trifle which belongs to Hilda and Elfrida, and this bare house, which at my death will be Harold's, if he survives me. I must leave Daundelyonn and let it, or shut it up; it is impossible now for us to remain here: every penny of ready money for this year is gone."

"To leave Daundelyonn! Better to die at once," I thought. "Where were we to go? What could we do?"

"So," he continued, "the plate and pictures must be sold to defray the cost of our present expenses, our actual wants, and the removal elsewhere. I had hoped that one good year with

the hops would have retrieved all my losses ; and so it would, but ‘ while the grass grows the steed starves.’ ” .

Surely the narration of such troubles was enough to rivet the attention of any mind ; but no, not so with mine, for I instantly began to speculate as to whether Miss Crockett could have upset this proverb, as well as she had done that of poor Mrs. Fenton.

Again Uncle Edward recalled me to myself by still continuing his remarks :

“ I see it all now, Sophie ; now, when it is too late. I have been living in a fool’s paradise, and have brought you all up to do the same—deluding myself with the fallacy that such small inheritance as might fall to the girls’ share through their poor mother’s marriage settlement would suffice to keep them in competence and comfort, and that by speculating in hops I should add handsomely to my estate ; so I have lived up to the full extent of my income, regardless of consequences, and by degrees have been led on to forestall it all in the hope of retrieving yearly losses, finding myself at last without so much

as will bury me decently. In short, I have lived the life of an unreflecting spendthrift, Sophie; and that is a bitter reflection for my declining years."

What could I say in reply to all this? Truly, I had never considered the case quite in the light in which he now put it before me; yet for a long time I could not but be aware that there was something radically wrong in Uncle Edward's money matters. Putting it as he did thus bluntly, there was no denying the truth of what he said in his own condemnation, much as I might wish to do so. All that I could urge in reply, was but sorry comfort. I could but express deep sorrow and sympathy, and beg him not to give way to vain regrets and useless self-reproach; bidding him hope for better days, in spite of all which now seemed so dark and threatening: and, as Miss Crockett was not within hearing, I reminded him of the proverb, that "It is always darkest the hour before day,"—concluding with the offer of every assistance in my power.

Uncle Edward, whose nature was to be hopeful and impressible, cheered up at this old saying;



the truth of which I always doubted, and do doubt still.

"Thanks, dear girl, thanks: you are a good friend in need, and a kind comforter into the bargain. Come, Sophie; let us go to breakfast, and then to business at once. Say nothing about all this to the Twins; let us spare them as much as we can."

Despite Uncle Edward's injunction to be silent, which I implicitly obeyed, he could not himself refrain from occasional ejaculations; which, to beings of quicker perceptions than my cousins, would have told the tale he wished to conceal.

Looking up at a portrait of a Sir Dudley Denne, which decorated the wall of the breakfast-room—a hideous old man with a huge ruff round a neck surmounted by a face like nothing in the world but a bad potato—he observed—

"And so he must go! Sir Dudley must be sold!"

"Sold!" cried Hilda; "what can you mean, papa?"

"Sold!" echoed Elfrida; "why should Sir Dudley be sold, papa?"

"Never mind, my dears; you will know why, one of these days. Have you done your breakfasts? If so, run away for the present, as I am going to be very busy."

Obedient to command, away they straggled, sorrow and surprise depicted on their faces; while Uncle Edward again relapsed into a mournful reverie, from which he was aroused by my suggesting that we should at once proceed with our work.

It was a painful duty; every picture, nay, every chair and table recalled some past scene, or summoned up some vanished form: story after story, anecdote after anecdote, followed in slow succession. We made but little progress that morning.

At last, however, the dreary task was accomplished; a few memorials of bygone days were retained, a small portion of the furniture was set aside, the rest was to be sold without reserve.

"Heaven help me, and has it come to this?" he would repeat mechanically again and again, as if unable to realize to its full extent the ruin he had brought about. "My poor wife has been

spared this trial, that is one consolation ; and your sister—poor Angelica ! What would her proud spirit have felt on seeing the family ruined, and the old house dismantled ? Well, well, they are at rest ; no earthly ill can touch them now. I grieved bitterly enough for them when they went, and murmured and repined at their loss, blind sinner that I was ; to-day I would not recall them if I could. All is for the best, Sophie, all is for the best ! ”

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## SOLD UP.

"Enough! it boots not on the past to dwell—  
 Fair scenes of other years a long farewell!  
 Rouse up, my soul! it boots not to repine,  
 Rouse up! for worthier feelings should be thine;  
 Thy path is plain and straight—that light is given,  
 Onward in faith, and leave the rest to Heaven."

SOUTHEY.

ERIC, Otho, Ernie, and Florence, all wrote condolingly upon being made acquainted with the state of Uncle Edward's affairs; and it was curious to observe how differently each, according to their several vocations, viewed the catastrophe.

Eric wrote to myself as follows :—

"DEAR SOPHIE,

"I ENCLOSE a draft for twenty pounds, more  
 as an earnest of my desire to help than with the  
 hope that it will be of any material assistance.

cannot tell you how angry I am with my father. I always thought him a kind-hearted affectionate man, perhaps if not positively weak, yet nothing strong about him but his prejudices; but there is something cruel in the way in which he has squandered everything, to indulge a pet fancy of his own for hop-growing. I know it is thought highly unfilial and wrong in children to call in question the actions and motives of their elders. It was the elders themselves, however, who raised this comfortable barrier against unpleasant scrutiny, and I, for one, will not consent to subscribe to so preposterous a doctrine. Setting aside altogether the right of inquiry by persons arrived at years of discretion into matters affecting their interests, let me ask how wisdom is to be learned, or experience gained, except by canvassing and sifting the actions of others as they chance to come under our notice? Nothing is more common than for people to commit some exceeding folly, implicating, as in the present case, half a dozen innocent and ignorant victims; then, when thoroughly immersed in a sea of trouble, to shout lustily for help, which when offered in connection with a few natural,

though unpleasant reflections, is accepted with an impatiently pugnacious or querulously ill-used air; possibly accompanied by some such morsel of stale rhythmic twaddle, as—

“From all the forms of human wee  
Save me from the damn’d ‘I told you so.’”

“Of course it is unpleasant to be told of one’s mistakes, one’s frailties, one’s errors; but many a man has been deterred from transgression by the fear of being called over the coals for his indiscretion. I repeat that I do not hesitate to feel exceedingly angry; and not the less so that I, in common with Otho and Ernie, have given up my share of the property: which I now regret having done, since it has been but a drop of water in an ocean of loss and ruin.

“I remember Miss Crockett was always great in hunting down hoary proverbs with nothing but their extreme age and consequent decrepitude to recommend them; ask her opinion of the above rhyming humbug, (which, by the bye, I don’t think I have quoted rightly,) and my sermon upon it: I am sure you will find that she agrees with me. Of course I don’t wish you to read this letter

verbatim to my father ; but you are welcome, as diplomatists say, to convey the sense of it in a mild form to him, as it may possibly prevent some future folly : if indeed he have the means of committing any left. The sale of the pictures will not realize much ; for beyond the individual interest attending them, they are of little merit : our forefathers' knowledge of pictures was very vague. But the plate is another matter : I should think that would sell for a good price. Amid all this hurly-burly, the thing I am most anxious to know is what *you* propose to do. Do you leave Daundelyonn with them ? Has all your trifle of money been swept away ? or only the balance of interest at the bank ? If you don't go with them, tell me what you intend to do ; I am more anxious about you than my father : you are an innocent victim, he has himself alone to blame ; yet, although I am very angry *with* him, I feel deeply *for* him and will do all I can to help him, though *you* will be my first thought. God bless you.

“ Ever as ever and for ever yours,

“ ERIC.”

Otho took quite another view of the case. His

peculiar mercantile creed saw neither right nor wrong, but simply luck, or the want of that element, in the whole matter—a prince to-day, a beggar to-morrow, and a prince again on the third day, was an occurrence in his part of the country as common as a fall of rain. “Specs” in hops as in other commodities would not “always turn up trumps;” he was very sorry for his uncle’s “bad luck,” and only wished to know how he could aid him. He dwelt much upon the large sums the sale of the pictures would realize, but did not suppose we should get more than six shillings and sixpence an ounce, at the outside, for the “cups, spoons, and things.”

I took it for granted that family portraits were at a premium among the mushroomocracy of Drybridge, and massive plate a drug and at a discount; and although I felt certain of Eric’s estimate of our gallery and its contents being the correct one, yet I could not help hoping that some eccentric admirer of bygone hideousness from that part of the country might fall in love with Sir Dudley’s kidney potato face, to say nothing of his ruff, and purchase him at a good round price: a hope



which, unlike most other hopes, was not doomed to disappointment, for a few days after Mr. Mumery our appraiser had put the "outside price" of three pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence on *Sir Dudley, Bart., and frame*, we received an offer of two hundred pounds from Way senior, if Mr. Denne would consent to part with it for a sum so inadequate to its value: he thought it a pity that so interesting a portrait, which had so often been spoken of by Otho, should go out of the family; and he therefore wished to present it to his son-in-law on the occasion of the christening of his son and heir, who at Way's request was to be named Dudley Way Denne.

Ernie was full of grief, not only on our account but on his own, for his Uncle Harcourt was dying; while Florence, writing under the inspiration of Louis Grey, gave a religious turn to her condolence. "It was one of those trials sent to test our reliance upon the mercy of Providence. It was hard indeed to be driven from our home at the close of life, but it tended to wean the affections from earthly considerations, and fix them elsewhere. It was a warning that our house must

be put in order, and preparation made for that great change which was most to be dreaded by those who left most behind them," and more to the same effect.

Expressions of condolence and regret, however well worded and sincere, will not satisfy an obdurate necessity, or silence a clamorous creditor.

Time wore on; every morning at breakfast came the observation, as a kind of grace after meat, that "something must be done;" and every evening on retiring to rest (I can hardly say to sleep) came the feeling that another day had passed, and that we had done little or nothing. At last I followed Uncle Edward into his now desolate den, and gently taking the *County Herald* away from his reluctant fingers, I compelled him with my own assistance to write a few of the more necessary letters. The first was to Mr. Mummery, desiring him to come over to Daundelyonn at his earliest opportunity, to give us his opinion upon the value of the plate, and such portions of the furniture and pictures as would be pointed out to him. The next was to the person who acted as agent for the property in the Isle of

Thanet, begging him to give a detailed description of one house in particular, which my uncle half fancied might suit him for a future residence.

"And now, dear uncle," said I, "let us get over the worst at once: let us ourselves count the plate, and set aside such portion of it as you desire to keep for future use; we shall then be ready for Mr. Mummery when he comes. I will mark clearly what is to be left, and then there will be no chance of mistake, and no time lost."

"Ah, Sophie, Sophie," cried poor Uncle Edward, sighing deeply, "this is indeed a trial: I feel the pinch of poverty now, don't I, dear?"

"Dear uncle, keep a brave heart for only a little while; it will be over soon: you will be better when it is all done."

He spent a long time in polishing his spectacles, but at last murmured, "Yes, it's all for the best, I know that: well, what are we to do now, child?"

There was something so helplessly dependent in his tone, that my heart smote me for giving him so much pain.

"I will go, Uncle, and make out the list alone:

you know I was always famous for my lists ;” and I attempted a sickly smile.

“No, no, no!” cried the old man, quickly ; “you will make mistakes : you don’t know all ; and there are some things I value—greatly value : you don’t know them all. Sophie, my dear, you are a good kind clever girl ; but no, no, I had rather go with you. Come, come, you are right ; we will get it over at once. I look upon it as an act of penance for past sins ; come, come.”

My poor uncle, as I followed him to the cellar, where, since the dispersal of the household, the great plate chests had been deposited for safety, I could not but marvel miserably at the change a few months had wrought in him. His step was feeble and tottering, his voice cracked and intractable, his hair snow white, and his trembling hand refused to carry the candle, which the uncertain light of the cellar rendered it necessary that we should each take with us. At last we reached the massive, ironbound, many-locked chests, the contents of which it had been the pride of the family to collect for centuries.

Uncle Edward fumbled vainly with the keys, and finally dropped them.

"I can't see; I can't even *feel*," he said, pitifully. "Sophie, help me, child; I am very helpless now."

With considerable effort I mastered the difficulty, and raised the lid of the largest coffer; paper and pencil in hand, I sat down to make the necessary catalogue.

"Now, dear Uncle," said I, "do you sit on that chest while I ransack the others. Don't you think we should make a very curious picture, full of Rembrandt-like shadows and deep effects—you and I seated here by the light of these two candles, in this great dark cave of a place, surrounded by chests piled up with plate?" I tried to speak cheerfully; for I well knew that a word, a look, or even a tone, would have sufficed, as Phosbe would have said, to "set master off."

Uncle Edward smiled dimly: he saw no curious picture; nothing met his gaze but a shadowy reality.

"Now, Uncle, let us begin: No. 1, a massive silver tankard, inscribed *Gulielmus Dennes, A.D. 1600*, and ——"

"Oh, no! not *that*," cried Uncle Edward, hastily, "not that! Why, it belonged to *my* great great grandfather, who built the left wing: no, no, put that *aside*; I cannot part with *that*, Sophie."

That it, with many others, must go, I well knew; but trusting in the course of our examination to find so much else which might possess equal or greater claims to be retained, that the very multitude would bewilder his choice, I said nothing, and placed it on one side.

"No. 2 is also a massive silver tankard, in the shape of a dog; the head takes off;" and suiting the action to the word, a strong smell of musk escaped. "There is no inscription on this," said I; "but only smell it, Uncle."

"Musk!" said he, musingly, "musk! Well, that is curious: that silver hound was Sir Alured's stirrup cup; there was a tradition that his wife was very fond of the smell of musk, but why musk should have been put into a tankard, or how it has kept its scent so long, puzzles me. Sophie, we must not part with that, must we?"

"Why, Uncle," I replied, "what use can it be to any of us? I dare say you never saw it twice in

your life; and there are so many other things you want more.

“But Sir Alured, my dear?”

“I have no doubt, Uncle, that he was a very respectable old gentleman, and drank a good deal in his time; but we don’t use tankards now: every dog has his day, and this one has had his, although he be made of silver.”

I purposely gave this light and common-place turn to the subject; but my heart smote me for endeavouring, with a faint joke, to condemn the quaint old cup, around which so many beaming faces of departed ancestors had once gathered; and whenever, since that day in the cellar, I smell the odour of musk, the recollection of it returns, with the thought of how little honour I then paid to the memory of “Sir Alured Denne and Dame Sybil, hys wyfe.”

“No. 3,” I proceeded, “is a carved ivory drinking horn set in silver; it has pegs down the inside: there is no date upon it.”

“A peg cup, Sophie? I’m not quite sure who that belonged to originally: that might go, I think; though I grieve to part with it, for it was a

great favourite of your dear aunt's: well—let it go.”

I saw enough of the carving, even by the uncertain light of a candle, to convince me that it was of more value than both the other cups put together.

“No. 4, a coffee-pot, with the device of a bear holding a staff, comes next, Uncle.”

“I quite forget all about that, my dear,” said he. “It must have belonged to one of the Leicester family; but how it came into our possession I don't remember: it may have been a present, or perhaps it was bought—that may go.”

It would be waste of time to enumerate all the objects of interest and value which one by one were drawn from the cavernous recesses of this and other coffers; or to give an account of each potent reason urged by my uncle for their retention. Some I got rid of with a paltry joke, others by urging necessity; until we came to a small plain solid cup, gilt inside, with the initials <sup>E&B</sup><sub>D</sub> deeply cut on its exterior. As I held it up, he nervously ejaculated: “No, never! While I live I'll never part with that cup: out of it your aunt



and I drank on the day we were married, on the first long stage of our honeymoon journey! Keep that Sophie, I desire."

Then came a long array of wine-coolers, candelabra, salt-cellars, &c., about the parting from which he exhibited no further objectiveness than an occasional sigh.

At last I produced a small morocco case, containing a child's knife, fork, and spoon of peculiar pattern. "These may go, at any rate," said I; "we have no babies now amongst us here; and poor Flossie's children, I'm sure, must not be born with a silver spoon in their mouths, much less a silver knife and fork into the bargain; so these will be useless."

"Stop, Sophie, stop," cried Uncle Edward, quite springing up under the influence of a sudden and startling energy; "let me look at them. Yes, yes, I thought so. Do you remember who those belonged to?"

"No, dear Uncle. Some of the children, I suppose."

"They were Harold's, Sophie. Harold's, my poor lost boy's! How often have I seen them

in his chubby hands, when he was a little dear handsome fellow, perched up at dessert between his poor mother and myself. He was the first, Sophie, to teach us how dear a little piece of flesh and blood could be; and we spoiled him more than all the rest. Where is he now, my boy, my handsome broken-hearted boy?—Oh! my God! where?”

Trembling and sobbing, he tottered towards the door.

“Close the lids. No more of this to-day, my dear: no more to-day; let us get back to daylight. Come, come!”

The tax upon his memory and affections, at the sight of these treasured trifles of departed days when all was bright and life full of hope—but now, seen by the dim uncertain light of a fading candle, in a place only too typical of the obliteration of all bright and joyous things, and of the dark vault to which he was fast hastening—had been too much for his exhausted energies; and they at last found relief in tears—that common solace for the sorrows of both first and second childhood.

Mr. Mummery came, and the plate was sold for a far larger sum than had been anticipated, in consequence of its exceeding purity and massiveness. Enough was realized to promote a feeling of momentary ease; during which, to my horror, so strong was the mania upon him, that Uncle Edward actually entertained the idea of again "going into hops" with the surplus. Indeed, it required all my powers of persuasion and remonstrance, backed by a judicious administration of some small portions of Eric's letter, to restrain him from this mad freak.

"Well," said he, "Sophie, I don't wish to seem obstinate: I am always open to reason, you know."

I was silent; for this was a point upon which I entertained my own peculiar opinions. Had he said that, although extremely opinionated, he frequently yielded points rather than be worried by clamour or remonstrance, and so gave himself the credit of being open to reason, his estimate of himself would have been nearer the truth.

"If you think," he continued, "that I had better not try hops again, I won't do so: there.

And now I have been thinking where we had better go: there is that small house at Minster we wrote about, which belongs to me still, and has not been mortgaged, in consequence of its having no title-deeds; but it is too small to hold us all comfortably: though perhaps it might take us with a good deal of squeezing, or we might build another room perhaps. What shall we do?"

Nothing was more certain than that we must live somewhere, and the Minster matter was under serious consideration, when Ernest again wrote, reporting his Uncle Harcourt's death, and praying me to go to town at once, and help him to look after his affairs. I seemed doomed never to be at rest: always running hither and thither on other people's account; always troubled with other people's affairs; either to stand as sponsor at a christening, to assist at a wedding, to attend a funeral, to nurse a sick child, or arrange the money matters of a ruined family. Such seemed to be my doom. Was this to be always my lot in life? For the moment I felt very much inclined to give up altogether, and let others take the

reins; the next instant I was ashamed of myself for harbouring such a thought. I was no worse off than many others:—

“Into each life some rain must fall,  
Some days must be dark and dreary.”

Although I felt by no means anxious to go to London, yet the desire to get Uncle Edward away from the tantalizing proximity to hops decided me. He should vacillate no longer: he should go to Minster at once, and I would go to town. My departure would expedite his.

“My dear Uncle,” said I, “I really think I ought to go and help Ernest: he has never troubled us in any way before; he must want some one to assist him. Perhaps if I linger he may make some foolish match, or be caught in some silly entanglement. I think I ought to go.”

The idea of Ernest, now the chief hope of the family, making a bad match, at once decided Uncle Edward.

“By all means, my dear,” he replied; “start at once. We will go to Minster and see if

we can't build a room for you : it would not cost much."

For a moment, the thought that Uncle Edward's turn for spending money might now take another and equally disastrous direction, by burying him in bricks and mortar, glanced across my mind and made me hesitate: indeed, had it been possible, I would rather have remained at Daundelyonn until he was fairly gone; but as this was impossible, I begged Miss Crockett to keep an eye upon him, and see that he did not linger until his little store of ready money was exhausted.

"My dear," said Miss Crockett, "no monkey ever stuck tighter to a bear's back than will I to your uncle. Ah! Sophie, Sophie, if *I* had married him I don't think it would ever have come to this. Very possibly it is vanity in me to think so, but I feel confident that I could have led him to indulge in far different pursuits than that eternal hop-growing, which always puts me in mind of the sport a fisherman *would* have had had he only 'been down last week;' now it is either too windy, too wet, too cold, too hot, or the water is too thick, or the weeds

afford the fish too plentiful food, or it isn't their feeding time, or the sun shines too brightly, or you're the wrong side the stream, or the banks are too high. It is just the same with hops; either the bine looks sickly, or the poles are blown down, or they have got the blight, or the fly, or the flea, or the something or other which generally results in the ruin of the unfortunate grower. No, no; it would have been different had he married me."

"Dear Miss Crockett, perhaps it would; but it is no use thinking of what *might* have been: no doubt, as Uncle Edward says, 'all is for the best.'"

"Don't my dear, don't: I can't bear it, I really can't; not even under the present circumstances," replied Miss Crockett, slightly colouring. "I don't wish to annoy or contradict you, but that expression comes too near the nature of a stale old proverb for me to endure."

\* \* \* \* \*

Although I knew that I was in all human probability leaving Daundelyonn for the last time, it was surprising how little it affected me out-

wardly at the moment. I had recently suffered so much misery within its doors, that I suppose there was some relief in the mere thought of any change; and the idea of peace elsewhere was paramount. Still, as I wandered, on the day of my departure, through the now silent and deserted rooms, I could not but feel the full extent of the ruin which had overwhelmed us. Oh! how mournful did those once gay and cheerful apartments now look, with their disarranged furniture and dusty pictures, on which, at rare intervals, the red chalk cross of the appraiser upon articles "to be retained" stood forth with painful significance; reminding me of the sanguinary sign by which the angel of destruction was to recognise the houses of the Israelites in the land of Egypt and pass them over. Alas! alas! the spirit of destruction was indeed abroad, sweeping away our home and hearth with unrelenting wing; and our feeble Lares and Penates were gods too weak to aid us in stemming the torrent of wreck and ruin. One last thought of how I had once seen these rooms tenanted by fair young forms and happy faces; one long last



look at them as they were now—the very type and emblem of the abomination of desolation; one other thought of how they would look when I next saw them, if indeed I was ever to see them again; one hasty farewell to my uncle and the sobbing girls—and I was gone.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### BABYLON.

"The night had closed around,  
 And o'er the sullen sky  
 Were the wide wings of darkness spread,  
 The city's myriad lamps  
 Shone mistily below,  
 Like stars in the bosom of a lake;  
 And its murmurs arose  
 Incessant and deep,  
 Like the sound of the sea  
 Where it rakes on a stony shore."

SOUTHEY.

ONCE more I was speeding on my travels, with the  
 prospect of London before me. London!—that  
 great focus of life and intelligence, whither the vital  
 energy of man rushes to display its vigour, and  
 wherein the mental powers seem to achieve per-  
 fection: that London of which I had heard so  
 much, and as yet seen so little; for, beyond the  
 recollection of one terrible house in Park Lane,

and the margin of the muddy Serpentine, I knew nothing of it.

I fell into a train of thought, little regarding who were my fellow travellers: I certainly had noticed a rather singular-looking being who occupied a niche in the vehicle; but as he was utterly silent, the fact of his presence soon vanished in the engrossing interest of my own reflections. I was therefore somewhat startled by his ejaculating suddenly—

“Hell in harness! Hell in harness! Here we go, clatter, clatter, clatter, fizz, fizz, fizz, dragged along at the tail of a monster who may carry us slap into the sea for all I know! It’s ticklish work, ma’am; isn’t it though? Don’t you feel frightened?”

I hardly knew what to say, for I was at once impressed with the conviction that he was insane; but by way of humouring him I ventured to observe that we were going *from* the sea, not *towards* it.

“Well, possibly we are,” he replied: “I hope so, but I don’t know; the world is turned hind side before, and mankind are all set upon destroy-

ing the equilibrium of creation with their railways above ground and below it, till we don't know whether we are upside down or not. I'm topside turvy myself; but I know *this*, fish never invade our element, why should we invade theirs? I never do; I hate water, I don't drink it, I never wash—I never even allow my servants to wash. The man-turbot-turtle is an attempt to mix up human beings and fish through the instrumentality of the mermaid; but it's a mistake—don't you think so?"

I confess that I became somewhat alarmed, not feeling sure as to the turn which the bee in my companion's bonnet might take, when a sudden relaxation of speed proclaimed our arrival at a station; and with it came the hope that some chance passenger might be let in to share with me his very original speculations. Fortunately an elderly gentleman was admitted, and took his seat in the carriage; as well as a remarkably stout traveller with a blue bag; and again we started.

Profound silence prevailed for some time, which was suddenly broken by my first companion remarking that he hated "pursy" people;

this pointed allusion to size immediately attracted the attention of the gentleman with the bag, who, catching my eye, thereby became enlightened as to the real state of the case, but evidently associated me with his lunatic fellow-traveller.

"Yes," continued the latter, "I hate corpulence; it interferes with dancing, and I like dancing: not that I would give a pin to dance in shoes; savages always dance barefoot, so do bears, and they dance well; so do unreflecting monkeys sometimes, and they are made to pay for it pretty smartly upon barrel organs. I hate barrel organs; I hate everything with a barrel," glancing significantly at his fellow passenger's portly dimensions. "I wonder what they have got inside? I should like to see."

The stout gentleman with the blue bag here buttoned up his coat with some precipitation.

"Opinions are divided upon it. Confucius says cocked hats and ginger-beer bottles, but I say buttered hay and mouse-traps, and I've written a poem to prove it; shall I read it to you? I have a copy in my pocket—but stop! have you ever had the mumps?"

The stout passenger signed a negative.

"Then you must excuse me, it might disagree with you; perhaps another time—stay, where are we? Edenbridge? I'll get out. I'll be off to the garden of Eden; it's open to the public, admission one shilling, children half price. Good afternoon."

And he vanished—only to return just as the train was starting; when, looking in at the window, he laid a finger mysteriously to his nose, and whispered—

"Hist! I've something to say of importance—you'll be discreet, of course—but I think it only right to mention it—burnt feathers!"

Here the train moved on, and we left him, still standing nodding good-humouredly, and repeating the oracular words — "burnt feathers!"

"Humph!" muttered the stout traveller, composing himself for a nap, "I thought he was a friend of yours, Miss: he seems to be quite *at large*; its very evident that he is several *fields from home*," and in five minutes he was snoring emphatically.

The elderly passenger contented himself with the observation—

“Poor man! got a *tile off*, no doubt!” and drawing a newspaper from his pocket, was soon immersed in its contents, leaving me once more to my own reflections.

The shades of evening had now passed into the darkness of night, and found me still indulging in vague speculations upon the fast approaching future; when my attention became fixed by the lurid light of what appeared to me to be a distant fire. At first I thought it must be the act of an incendiary at some great homestead towards which we were hastening; but a quarter and then half an hour had elapsed, and yet it seemed still equally distant, and equally intense: by degrees this halo became more generally diffused, more lofty, and ill-defined; when it suddenly struck me that it must be the lights of London reflected from the clouds above, which produced the meteoric haze so like the nimbus of some distant fire.

The lights of London! My first impression of the magnitude of Babylon the Great was given

me by the clouds! Then the scattered lamps in the suburbs, like bivouac fires of the outposts of an army, became thicker and thicker, until at last we were enveloped in the fiery haze of the long corridor-like streets of the mighty city.

There was a pause, during which our tickets were being taken, affording me time to collect my scattered thoughts a little; and then we passed under the intricate iron frame-work supporting the roof of the station, beneath which a long line of eager expectant faces of friends and porters gleamed pale and ghastly in the sudden glare of countless gas-lights: the doors flew open, and echoes of two hundred clamorous voices shouting to friends, or calling stoutly for their luggage, made themselves stunningly manifest. We had arrived.

Ernest, looking much older, but very handsome in his deep mourning, soon discovered me; and in less than ten minutes we were rolling rapidly along towards the West in his late uncle's comfortable brougham.

As we drove, endless were his inquiries into the circumstances attending the "break up" at Daun-



delyonn ; to which I replied, I fear, but inattentively, so much was I distracted by all I saw and heard. Gradually the streets grew wider, the houses larger, the people cleaner ; fine carriages resplendent with heraldic devices, and prancing steeds glittering in silver harness, replaced the heavy creaking waggons and colossal horses of the city.

Oh ! what a noisy, busy, dirty throng were pushing and jostling through a miserable existence in the wretched suburbs we had passed ! What a gay, bright, brilliant crowd were whirling away the precious moments of a fashionable life in the clean, airy, opulent " West End ! " How morally and physically foggy the one ! how sunny and prosperous the other !

I had quite settled it in my own mind that the house we were going to was one of enormous proportions, with frowning portals and altogether a princely air. Indeed I fancied that I remembered it well, and could have driven to the door at once without difficulty. Judge my surprise then, when in the midst of an engrossing conversation, we suddenly stopped before a residence of very unpretend-

ing, if not mean, appearance, with a decidedly insignificant entrance.

"Is *this* the house, Ernie?" I inquired with astonishment.

"The same, my dear; it has never altered since I knew it."

"What! can this be the mansion in Park Lane where you were born, and to which we all came from Wales?"

I scarcely know why, but I instantly felt a pang of utter disappointment. Where were all the lofty windows, stately staircases, and rooms like halls of audience? Alas! thus does imagination ever play us false. We build our castles in the air only to see them crushed beneath the foundations of a stern reality. The nut-shell in Wales had erected the mansion in Park Lane, which the glories of old Daundelyonn had reduced to most unpoetical dimensions.

"I must see all the rooms before I do anything else," I remarked.

"Well, let us go together, if such be your fancy; but you will have plenty of time for that by-and-by."

"No, Ernest, I must go at once; I could not rest until I have done so. Yes, now I see them all once more I do remember them; but how they are robbed of their proportions! This was the nursery; how small it looks now. This was poor mamma's room, but the furniture is changed; and this was the drawing-room: I remember the mirrors, but the tiger-skin is gone. Oh! Ernie, what sad memories," and, throwing my arms round his neck, I wept bitterly.

I had so long been obliged not only to suffer my own sorrows with silent fortitude, but to find courage and consolation for others in their distress, that the sense of support and companionship which Ernest's presence afforded was almost more than I could bear; and I feared to allow it free access to my heart lest the bow of my spirit, hitherto so tightly strained, should relax altogether, and become unfitted for future warfare with the world and its trials.

Although far from being of either a cold or unfeeling nature, Ernest had a constitutional repugnance to everything which promoted reflec-

tion: melancholy reflections were to be avoided like the plague; he dreaded the "blue devils," as he called them, they always made him fidgetty and uncomfortable: life, he would say, was "far too short to be spent in botheration;" sorrow he always "turned out" *instantly*. Death drove him to the opera, despondency to a ball.

One reason, no doubt, for his love of London, was the large facility it afforded him for getting rid of self, when self proved an unwelcome companion.

No sooner did he find that I was likely to have what he termed "a fit of the blues," than he proposed an adjournment to his "sanctum," where there were no end of things to amuse us, and a 'capital picture gallery.'

Not wishing to render our first evening together a melancholy one, and fearing to relax my self-reliant energies too much or too suddenly, I checked the manifestation of further feeling with a violent effort, and at once assented to his proposal.

This gallery of which he bragged so much, but which did not give me a very exalted idea of his taste, consisted of row upon row of coloured

engravings of popular ballet girls; prints of actors and actresses in all sorts of sentimental and tragical postures; interspersed with crayon ideal portraits of elderly Turks, upon the point of stabbing interesting young female slaves—beauties with preternaturally long eyelashes; champions of the ring, with turnips for hands, squaring at imaginary foes; thin little jockeys, very much bent in the back, upon long legged racehorses; and a few caricatures and sporting sketches, including one or two “scenes on the road,” in the shape of mail coaches on the point of upsetting. In addition to all these embellishments to his “sanctum,” there were one or two rather questionable French portraits of “Innocence” in exceedingly transparent drapery, and “Souvenirs,” in no drapery at all; a gold chain and pair of ruby ear-rings doing duty for all superfluous habiliments.

For the rest, the room was much like most bachelor snuggeries; foils, boxing-gloves, fishing-rods, snuff-boxes, and cigar-cases, were the principal adornments, always excepting a statuette of “the Gitana,” and a bust of “the Duke.” The table was littered with endless cards, notes,

and pamphlets; and above all, in all, and over all, hung an overpowering and pervading atmosphere of stale tobacco smoke.

Dinner concluded, and the cloth removed, I was just beginning to make inquiries as to future arrangements, when a sudden revulsion of feeling, as though the recollection of having committed a crime or omitted an important duty, passed over me, paralysing in an instant both body and mind.

"Morgan, Morgan, Ernie: Morgan! where is she?" My voice and manner startled Ernie, who was proceeding to light a cigar.

"Good gracious, Sophie, how you made me jump! I nearly burnt my fingers. Morgan, poor old soul, is all right and tight; she is about the house somewhere, in the housekeeper's room, most likely: she generally sits there in the evening, like a cat watching for mice."

"I must go and see her at once: I ought to have done so long ago;" and away I went, not without the dread of her sharp expostulation for my neglect, and was in the act of rushing towards her, when the sight of a large arm-chair before

the fire, whence protruded the corner of a pillow, told the tale of age and infirmity, and checked my rapid advance. Stealing quietly up beside her, I gently said, "Morgan dear, I am come to see you at last; it is Sophie."

"Ah, I knew who it was, my dear Miss Sophie: I have been expecting you every minute. I wanted to come to you upstairs, but they wouldn't let me get in the way of draughts in the passage; I am troubled with asthma now, and have had a many blisters on, but they don't do no good, look you."

Then raising herself from her pillows, she observed, "You are grown very much since I saw you, and you look a deal older; you are very like your poor mother. And how is Mr. Denne? It's nigh on six years since I see him: ah, dear, dear! what sad doings down at Dandelion; my boy, I mean Master Ernie—*Mr.* Ernest I suppose I ought to say now—told me all about it."

"Yes, Morgan; great troubles have come upon us; but we must hope that, as my uncle says, 'all is for the best.'"

"Ay, ay, it's well for those as can say that;

many people says so for others, but not many for themselves. It's a hard trial, though, when one sees one's bits of traps taken away and sold, a'most for nothing, look you. And poor Miss Angelica too, she's gone! Well, she was the handsomest of you all. Ah, dear, dear, we're all going: going fast too, one after another; only we're beginning at the wrong end: it didn't ought to be the young 'uns first, and *then* the old 'uns; did it, dear? And Mr. Harold, he ain't to be heard of: but he wasn't one of *my* boys."

Not feeling at all prepared to enter into a recital of past miseries, in which it had been my unhappy fate to act a prominent part, I turned the conversation upon the subject of her own ailments; but she did not respond with the usual alacrity of decrepitude.

"Well, Morgan, dear, and so you are troubled with asthma?"

"Yes, miss, and that's not the worst, for I feel tight all over, just as if I was in a pair of leather trousers. When I stand up it seems as if I was standing on two bladders; what do you think it can be, Miss?"



"Well, Morgan dear, I can't say. What does the doctor seem to think of it?"

"Why he says it's the dropsy; but my appetite is good, and so I don't think it can be that: I think it's just old age, no more nor less, and they can't cure that. And Mr. Otho, Miss Sophie, what sort of a young lady has he married? I wonder if his legs is any fatter than they was, they was so skinny when he was a boy: you don't remember them, but I do; they was skin and bone, no more, look you, honey."

This "look you, honey" of old Morgan's was the last remnant of her Welsh dialect which had survived her sojourn in London, and seemed, through the long years of our separation, as the one link which connected her altered voice with the early scenes of childhood.

I was about to describe Otho's wife, when Ernie's voice shouting "Coffee" from the stair-head recalled me to the "sanctum;" not however, before Morgan had told me where I was to sleep, (which by the way I knew already,) and enjoined upon me to "leave all my things out," so that she might see to the airing and mending of them:

"I dare say," she added, "they want a deal of 'seeing to.'"

Returning to Ernest, the subject of the future was renewed.

"Well, Ernie, and what do you propose to do? Do you remain in this house?"

"Why, you see," he replied, "I am here now only on sufferance. My poor uncle (you would have got on with him, Soph, if chance had only thrown you in each other's way), my uncle, you see, has left me pretty well off; but this house goes to his heir at law. I am only his great nephew, remember, (you don't mind my smoking, do you?) but the furniture is mine, and some of the valuables; when all matters are settled, I expect to have about eight hundred a year: not so bad, eh? So I propose that we should look out for a snug box somewhere, compact, comfortable, and airy, but not too big, and there set up shop. Eric talks too of coming over, and if he does, we shall be a jolly family party. I should like to have the old gentleman up; but I couldn't stand those twins: no, you and I, and Eric; that will be capital, won't it?"

Here he rubbed his hands and looked so generally hilarious under the influence of these visions of the future, that I almost caught the infection, but repressed it.

"Yes, Ernie, it sounds delightful;" but at the idea of Eric's return a strange emotion stole over me: it was something akin to pain. The thought or long discussions upon art and metaphysics suddenly presented themselves, mingled with rides up avenues, leading to long corridors of gas-lights; and they silenced me for the moment.

"Why, Sophie, the notion does not seem much to suit your book after all, although you say it sounds delightfully; you look so glum."

"Glum! do I, Ernie? Well, forgive me, I shall do better by-and-by, I hope; but lately I have had so much reason to doubt the existence in this world of everything except death and distress, that I fear to allow my mind to dwell upon the thoughts of so bright a future, and the mental conflict made me look 'glum,' as you call it: that was all; go on."

"Well," said he, "I shall write to-morrow, and tell Eric what we propose to do, and ask

him to come over at once: why should he not set up here? He'll have no rent to pay, and he'll amuse us into the bargain: by-the-bye, we must have a house with a room that will do for a studio; even if he does not *live* with us altogether, he may come by fits and starts, and stay no end of time. We'll go house-hunting to-morrow, Soph;" and he concluded by humming, "And a hunting we will go."

Happy Ernest!—death, sorrow, sickness; nothing ever had, would, or I believe *could*, tame his unfailing health and spirits.

"Good night, Soph, God bless you, old girl!" was his last adieu, as, after a long chat over our own affairs, and those of Sir Brutus, Otho, Harold, and Whirlingham, we toiled upstairs to bed.

"Sleep well, Soph, we have a hard day's work before us: never mind, we'll see if we can't put a little life and colour into those pale cheeks before long. Eric won't know you, and will say we have been killing you, if I don't; we'll try a little London rouge, eh? Good night, old lady, good night."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## HOUSE-HUNTING.

"To be let or sold, a semi-detached fourteen-roomed house, pleasantly situate in the neighbourhood of Warwick Square. For particulars and cards to view, apply to Mr. Holdworthy, House Agent, Ebury Street, Belgrave Square.—Terms moderate."—*The Times*.

THE prospect of house-hunting was an occupation so novel, that I was enchanted with it. The idea of displaying a considerable amount of acuteness not unmingled with some little authority; the thought of exercising my talent for selection, of which I was not disposed to think meanly, among such large commodities as town houses; and of indulging a reasonable curiosity and inquisitiveness to the utmost, was so charming that I had not felt so much elasticity of spirit for many a long day as on the morning we sallied forth in quest of a spot whereon to pitch our tent.

So many were the sage pieces of advice with which Ernie stored me, as to how I should act towards the various house-agents we might meet with in our morning's expedition—how much I was to believe of their account of localities, drains, taxes, rent, repairs, damp, and sunny aspects, and how much I was to consider "bosh," as he termed it—that he succeeded in fairly bewildering me before we had driven half a mile.

"We will first go to an agent and get the particulars of half a dozen houses which sound likely," said Ernie, "and then we'll make the round of them."

"Don't you think, Ernie, we had better settle in our own minds the amount of rent we can afford to pay; it would simplify matters very much, and save both time and discussion with the agent."

"You speak like a book, Soph; well, what shall we say?"

"I have heard," I replied, "that no one ought under any circumstances to pay more than the tenth part of their income as rent; but I don't know whether that is to include taxes."

"Rents are high in London," he replied, thoughtfully; "so I suppose taxes must not be included, or we shall get but a dismal kind of a kennel for our money. Suppose we say one hundred a year, and as much less as possible."

"Let one hundred a year be our *mot du quet* then, Ernie."

Into the pliant ears of agent after agent we poured the tale of our necessity; who always by some singular fatality had the very thing we wanted, "but the rent was a *leetle* more than the price we offered: however, we could see." Belgravia, Tyburnia, Regent's Park, Brompton Old and New, were explored; the heights of Craven Hill were ascended, the depths of Kensington gravel pits did not escape our notice, but in vain: the inhabitable houses were beyond our means, and those which in a pecuniary sense were eligible were in an olfactory one impossible. I had no idea before of the difficulty of poisoning people by unsavoury smells.

At last I began to think that house-hunting was not half the fun I had anticipated; and was falling into one of my old speculations, as to why a

man with a hundred a year in his pocket, which he is willing to pay for rent, cannot find such a thing as a fair exchange for his money in London, when Ernie, who was fast becoming unpleasantly fidgetty, said peevishly—

“Sophie, we’ll have another shot, and if that fails we’ll shut up for to-day.”

We made our final stand before the office of a Mr. Holdworthy, one of the most blandly bewitching and soothing of men; his room was so well carpeted, so clean, his desk so neatly leathered, his brass work so bright, the touch of his hand upon his books so gentle, and his general appearance so dovelike, or “oily,” again to quote Ernie, that our fatigue and irritability vanished with the thought that we had at last fallen upon the very individual who, above all others, could and would satisfy our demands. Mr. Holdworthy had deeply studied and apparently practised very successfully the art and mystery of humbug. No inquiry met with an “if,” or a “but;” no suggestion was offered, but was answered instantly in the affirmative; no objection but was removed at once: what a delightful man was Mr. Hold-



worthy! I felt him to be a true friend, as he peered upon me for the first time in his life with erect hair and smiling countenance, above his gold spectacles: he was an ornament to his calling; indeed, I felt abashed at Ernie's putting so many questions to him in a tone which I felt to be almost unwarrantable, and some little sense of surprise that all the eligible houses should be in the charge of this one man. In fact, I had just received my first dose of true London humbug, from the hands of one of the chiefs of his craft, and I confess I thought it exceedingly pleasant. What a pity it was that he utterly abandoned his "h's!"—He did not exchange them or place them improperly: he simply abandoned them altogether. It was a very great pity; and frequently, in the course of his conversation, I wished that he would make use of them anyhow or anywhere, rather than treat them with such utter contempt.

"Not more than a 'undred a year, Madam," he murmured; "pray be seated: not more than a 'undred a year;" at the same time rustling the leaves of his address book; "to be sure,

Madam, not more than a 'undred a year? 'Ill, what 'ave we at a 'undred?"

Hill, a sickly youth with an incipient moustache of a pale straw colour, who had hitherto sat overshadowed by his principal, scratched his stubby chin, then taking from a shelf a large green volume strapped with red, placed it before the gold spectacles, indicating a particular entry with a very flat and dirty forefinger, the nail of which had been greedily bitten to the quick.

"That will do; 'Ill; thank you." Then turning upon us once more the light of that oily countenance, he observed, "not on *this* side of the bridge: not on *this* side; *but*, on the other—the *other*."

"Across the bridge," expostulated Ernie; "what bridge, Westminster or London? Oh, no, that won't do at all, too far off!"

In a voice tremulous with the pleasure it afforded him in being able instantly to undeceive us—a pleasure which with him took the tangible form of polishing and replacing his spectacles, Mr. Holdworthy smilingly assured us that he only meant over the canal.

"I allude, in fact, to Belgravia South: Pimlico, as it *is* called sometimes. It is a new and improving neighbourhood; I'm sure it will please the lady: wide streets, well drained, capital houses, all the last improvements, and moderate rents."

"Whereabouts is this bridge? is it far?" inquired Ernie, rather woefully.

"Oh *dear* no, sir," said Mr. Holdworthy, so persuasively, that I felt convinced that *had* it been *far* he would at all events have considered whether he could not have brought it nearer, if only on Ernie's account:—"Not ten minutes drive from Belgrave Square: 'Ill shall show you the way. 'Ere 'Ill, put on your 'at."

Ernie remonstrated against removing Mr. Hill from his employment, and was at last compelled positively to refuse his assistance. So well did Mr. Holdworthy know in his own mind that Ernie was a man who repelled foreign aid almost as an indignity, and would by no means employ it, that he felt safe in pressing his services upon us. 'Ill having made out sundry "cards to view," away we drove "over the bridge," and into that new district of London, known as "Belgravia South"

by the weak-minded, but to those of stronger nerves as "Cubittopolis-on-Thames."

We were delighted with the wide streets, handsome houses, and noble squares of this *terra incognita*—"over the bridge."

"This looks likely," said Ernie, cheerfully. "It's very odd that I have never been here before; I have seen this bridge often, but always thought it led into the back settlements along the banks of the Thames: why it is a splendid place. This is very like training for the treadmill, Soph," he continued, as we completed our last descent to the street; "but I believe we have got what we wanted at last. You see it is cheerful and sunny, new and clean, has a conservatory for you to cultivate all sorts of weeds in, a good bath-room, and no end of a studio for Eric, if he likes to turn it into a painting-room."

On our return to Mr. Holdworthy, he manifested even yet more intense delight at our success than he had evinced in the morning, when we had little to be delighted about.

"The 'ouse is a bargain," said he; "in four or five years time it will fetch double what it

is worth now: it won't be to be 'ad for double."

"It is for sale, then?" inquired Ernie.

"Yes, sir; I'll show you the particulars. 'Ill, give me the book of particulars."

'Ill again handed the volume with the same well-nibbled fingers. Having read all the "particulars" aloud, he ventured to express the delight it would give him to be permitted to conduct the business on Ernie's behalf, or to furnish him with the names of the parties to whom it belonged.

Ernie having elected the latter course, we turned our faces towards home; my companion in so amiable a temper that he protested "a child might play with him." The idea of having a "house of his own" greatly pleased him.

"I'll see what I can muster up, Soph, when all is settled in Park Lane; I may be able to buy it out and out; if I can I will: it will be much better to be one's own landlord, won't it?"

So fatigued were we by the toils of the day, that after dinner we both fell asleep in our chairs

until bed-time ; whence, after very lazily lighting our candles we retired to roost, there, as Ernie expressed it, "to complete the operation like a whole colony of owls."

\* \* \* \* \*

Morning found us once more examining the house we had selected, noting such alterations and additions as our fancy suggested. While thus employed, we were accosted by a short, active-looking man, with a very snub nose, sharp black eyes, and shuffling gait, who, apologising for his intrusion, announced himself to be the spokesman partner out of three to whom the house belonged. He was the very antithesis of Mr. Holdworthy, rough, active, sharp-spoken, and horny-handed ; in his use of the letter "H" he was equally antithetical, for while the former positively ignored its existence, the latter introduced it in all manner of words, right or wrong.

"Why, Mr. Dubben," (such was the spokesman's name,) "the price you ask is exorbitant," remarked Ernie: "quite out of all reason."

"No, sir, hexcuse me," was Mr. Dubben's reply,

"hexcuse me, but raily 'tain't hexorbitant. A pretentious house like this here one, a house with a bath-room has his heated from the kitching fire, and a conservative; why it will halways let well. It has a hair with it has will fetch it's value, come what will; hall I say is this, hif you buys this house, why you buys a bargain, and that's about ave it. There ain't no pockets in these walls; built right straight hup they is: no skimping. I never wastes my time in building bad houses—I calls that a digging of a hole and filling of it hup again."

"Well," responded Ernie, "we must see what the lawyers and surveyor say to it all."

"Why, sir?" inquired Mr. Dubben, "can't we settle hour matters without the help of them customers? They honly makes a bill, that's what they does. I hates 'em hall, for my part; but I suppose if we was hall honest we shouldn't want no lawyers. And them copper-plate chaps—them surveyors; they comes for all the world like a pickpocket hinto a church just to see what they can pick hup, and bolts agin. I hates all their fine writing and flourishes; but I suppose if we

was hall clever we shouldn't want no school-masters."

"I suppose then," remarked Ernie, "that you fancy *they* 'dig holes and fill them up again.'"

"That's about ave it," responded Mr. Dubben, sharply, with a grin and peculiarly sagacious wink of his eye, as though he would imply, "I see you catch the idea."

"He seems a rough sort of fellow that, but honest, I dare say," observed Ernie, as we turned once more into the street, or rather into what *was* eventually to become one; it being rather a street in the skeleton as yet.

"Yes; he is intelligent and straightforward," I replied; "and perhaps there is a good deal of truth in his strictures upon lawyers and surveyors: still, do you think we should do well to take all he says for gospel and buy the house without some legal advice?"

"Well, Soph, I don't know; I almost incline to think that I would as soon take my own opinion as anyone else's advice. I think I'll tell him to get on with the house and that we will decide in a day or two."



Mr. Dubben here overtook us and renewed his assurance that it was "a pretentious house, with no *superfluency* of room;" just the thing we wanted, and he would finish it to our taste "right haff."

"Well," said Ernie, "you had better get on with it, and I'll let you know in a day or two what we decide."

"Very good, then," replied Mr. Dubben, "I'll get on with it; and 'spose in the meantime we leaves it a hopen question."

"Good," said Ernie, "leave it an open question, as you suggest."

The day or two grew into a week or two; nay, we were turning the corner of the second month from the day on which we first explored "Cubitopolis," yet still Ernie remained undecided.

One fine morning, however, as we sat at breakfast, Mr. Dubben was announced as wishing to have "five minutes' talk with the gent." On entering the room, which he did with a shuffling, uneasy gait, and the air of a man who felt that the apartment was too clean for his clothes, he stated the object of his visit to be, that a "party,"

a "very respectable hold gent from Richmond," had been "hafter the house," which was now "near handy finished," and he wished for a one-and-twenty years' lease.

"Now sir," he continued, "you was fust to speak, and fust come fust served is my motter. My partners is hall for selling the house right hoff, and they worrits my life out so to do; so I said as I'd see the gent in Park Lane this morning, and that's the cause of my being here. We's to give the party a hanswer about the lease by three o'clock to-morrow, so Mr. Denne if you'll be so good as to think it hover once for all this hevening and make a *derzision* before three o'clock to-morrow, why, you shan't have no cause to complain of hus; and I can't say no fairer than that, can I?"

Ernie was silent, but pertinaciously attempted to balance a fork on his forefinger, which at every fresh essay he let fall with a loud clatter on his plate; at last I could stand the noise no longer, and gently removed the offending article.

This action restored the power of speech, for he remarked,—

"You are quite sure, Mr. Dubben, that you are not leading me into one of your 'holes,' and when well in, you don't think of 'filling it up?'"

"Tain't likely," replied Mr. Dubben, with a grin. "I am going to build a lot more houses there, and I don't want to get a bad name in the district."

"Well, Soph, what do you say? shall we have the house?"

I was inclined to silence, for I thought it ill-advised to buy it without any advice; but knowing how much silence irritated Ernie, I simply remarked that I certainly liked the house very much, but that perhaps if he sent down to Mr. Dubben in the course of the day it would be time enough. That worthy during Ernie's appeal to me had been employed in violently scratching the rim of his beaver with a very enlarged thumb, and during the short silence which followed he continued the operation with rapid glances from one to the other of us.

"Very good, sir," he replied, at last; "in the course of the day: 'spose we leave it a hopen

question till this evening?" and so he moved to depart, when Ernie stopped him.

"Well, Mr. Dubben, Miss Denne likes the house; I hate delay, I'll have it—and so you may tell the respectable party at Richmond."

I have since had reason to believe that the party alluded to was a myth, merely brought into a shadowy existence by Mr. Dubben's brain to hurry Ernie's decision.

On the memorable day upon which Ernie became master of a house of his own, we received a letter from Eric, in reply to Ernie's invitation, promising a long visit when once we were fairly settled: as to taking up his residence with us, that he "knew nothing about," he "would see:" "that might or might not be," it depended upon "circumstances," and there were a good many more ambiguous phrases to the same purpose; a post-script was added, "What does Sophie say?"

What *did* Sophie say? Sophie was silent; Sophie would not influence his decision by even one word of approval, or disapproval. Sophie would give no sign; she would not even *think*, if she could help it, of what might or might not come to pass:

she would keep on her own course, and try to banish the past as well as bar the future from her mind. Taking the advice once given on a memorable morning in the keep at Daundelyonn, she would—

“Act! act in the living present,  
Heart within, and God o’erhead.”

Alas! the very effort to forget is a kind of memory in itself; the very resolution to think only of the present proves how constant is the recollection of the past.

“What does Sophie say?” Nothing! She smiles as the postscript is being read, but “she gives no sign.”

## CHAPTER XL.

## PIMLICO.

"How shall I meet thee? With an eye  
 That hath no brightness, yet no tears:  
 With heedless tone and cold reply,—  
 The chilling garb indifference wears?  
 With sadden'd heart, yet careless mien,  
 Revealing nought of what has been?  
 Yes; changes sad have altered us:  
 Alas! that I must meet thee thus!"

REMOVALS have been so often and so well described,  
 that it would be tedious to dwell upon ours; I  
 suppose they all bear a strong resemblance to each  
 other. Fortunately for us our new home, although  
 of fair dimensions, was a size smaller than the  
 Park Lane house, so that the carpets and curtains  
 needed only a little clipping to suit admirably;  
 the furniture too required "weeding:" some was  
 altered, some exchanged, and some sold. At last the

dreaded hour arrived, and the vans, attended by a host of eager workmen, were at the door; this was the signal for me to pack myself and Morgan into a cab, and filling up the space we left vacant with glass shades and ornaments, to drive off to Pimlico, and there station myself, awaiting the arrival of the furniture. What a wearying, chilling process is removing from one house to another!

"Here, where are you going with that table? That ain't to go up-stairs, stupid! that belongs to the dining-room," shouted one.

"Where are you off to with that hamper? That don't go into the dining-room; that's for the pantry," bawled another.

"Mind them walls now, with that there wardrobe, and don't knock them *barristers* about," cried Mr. Dubben.

"Now, Paddy, don't you be a lollin' agin the 'what not.'"

"I aint a lollin'," retorted the gigantic Irishman, thus apostrophized.

"You were a lollin', you're a lollin' up agin it now."

"Look alive there with that roll of carpet: the last van is just come, and we shan't a' done afore night," urged a voice from the passage.

These and such like vociferations, accompanied by the scraping of heavy boots, the lumping and thumping of weights overhead, and a general smell of straw, damp matting, tarpaulin, and warm carpenters, greeted our ears and noses during the first eight-and-forty hours of our sojourn in our new house. Who is there that has not heard and smelt them? They are discomforts common to the lot of all; but I believe that I had claim to a special grievance in the huge Irishman before mentioned: he was an awkward, shambling Hercules, who insisted during the early part of the day in carrying up-stairs without assistance the most massive pieces of furniture, although there were half a dozen admiring idlers looking on. In vain I implored him to desist; he would continue to imperil his own strength and the furniture until after dinner and a more than sufficient quantity of beer, when a slight sprain in the back brought him to his senses, and compelled him to accept Morgan's good offices in the kitchen,



at that fruiterer's shop: I know it is somewhere hereabout," shouted a voice, which I at once recognised as that of Eric.

"Ernie, that is Eric; I am certain it is his voice," I exclaimed.

"What nonsense! now you will keep fancying all the evening that every cab which passes must be Eric; one would think you were in love with him, Soph, to hear you."

Fortunately for me it was dusk when Ernie made this random shot, for I felt the blood mounting to my cheek at the unpremeditated insinuation; sheltering myself beneath the comforting cloak of darkness, I boldly replied, "Love or hate, that is Eric, I am certain; and he cannot find the house: if you won't go down to the door I will."

Ernie, with strong symptoms of irritation, was goaded by the threat into opening the door, just as the dull, hollow sound of the wheels of a heavily laden cab drew near.

"Holloah! Ernie, is that you? I've been hunting about for the last two hours trying to find the house, but no one knew where it was. Why don't

you illuminate, or burn blue lights every now and then, when friends are expected?"

My heart beat wildly as I heard the well-known accents: should I rush out to greet him, or wait his entrance?

"What's the fare?" shouted Ernest. "Here, cabby, have you got change for a five shilling piece?"

The delay gave me time to decide upon the line of action; I would go and meet him.

"Where is Soph?" inquired Eric.

"Gone to dress for dinner," was the reply.

"No, here I am, Eric," I cried, at the same time rushing into the passage, and in an instant came the greeting as of old.

"Come, let us get inside," said Ernest; "my man can bring your traps in."

"What is his name?" asked Eric.

"Davis," was the reply.

"Here, Davis, mind you don't leave anything behind; be so good as to be careful: there are things of value both on the roof and inside."

Once fairly seated at the dinner-table, beneath a strong light, I was better able to take a quiet

survey of Eric, who, I found, was much altered : he appeared taller, more " filled out " and athletic, than when I saw him last ; he had a huge beard of dark, glossy, wavy hair, which I thought a great improvement—perhaps because it reminded me of the memorable night on which he appeared as the wizard, Michael Scott ; he was also rather bald, which increased the intellectual expression of his already high forehead. Having concluded my survey, I was just indulging in conjectures as to whether he found as much alteration in me as I in him, when he thus broke the thread of my speculations—

" Soph, a most extraordinary circumstance occurred to me to-day on landing from the steamer ; they say that truth is stranger than fiction, and upon my word I believe it."

" Well, what was it ? You are always so discursive," said Ernie, impatiently.

" Why this—whilst I was seated in the coffee-room of the Pavilion Hotel at Folkestone, a tall, soldier-like, good-looking man came up to me, and after staring very hard said, apolo-  
gizingly—

“‘I can’t be mistaken; your name is Denne?’

“‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘my name certainly is Denne.’

“‘I felt convinced that I could not be deceived; but you are not Otho Denne.’

“‘No,’ I replied, ‘I’m not, but I have a cousin of that name.’

“‘Was he not staying in the Isle of Man some years ago with two or three ladies, his sisters?’

“‘He was,’ I replied.

“‘And they were called away suddenly by the death of a Mrs. Denne?’

“‘Yes, that is quite true,’ I replied; ‘that lady was my poor mother.’”

“‘How curious!’ exclaimed Ernie and I in a breath.

“‘Are they well, and where are they?’ he continued,” said Eric.

“‘I am at this moment on my way to stay with Ernest Denne and his sister Sophia, who have taken a house in Pimlico.’

“‘Sophia! It was by your likeness to that lady that I knew you. Do, pray, give me their

address, I am most anxious to renew the acquaintance; my name is Arden: Colonel Arden, of the Bengal Army.’ ”

“I gave him the address,” continued Eric, “and he promised to call in a day or two: he asked a great deal about all the family; you in particular, Sophie; and expressed a hope that when his name was mentioned he might not be quite forgotten.”

And so the Brownie of former days, he of the buffalo robe, had returned to England! indeed truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

“Do describe him, Eric,” said I. “I wonder whether I should know him again. He was one of our party on the memorable day of our trip to Renasse, and he saw us on board the steamer on our return home: do tell me what he is like.”

“Well, Soph, I was so surprised by the whole circumstance, that I had little time to scan his personal appearance, and the train too was just starting; but he is a fine, frank, soldier-like looking fellow, with a gentlemanly, quiet, and unaffected manner: he is very much sun-burned,

with that peculiar ingrained look in the skin which is characteristic of all persons who have served long in India; he is as thin as a whipping-post, like myself, a great deal taller than either Ernest or myself, and very grey. By the by, am I not growing bald, Soph?"

"Certainly, your hair has managed to slip down on to your chin," answered I.

Ernest laughed heartily.

"Why, Eric, you put me in mind of the description of Sir Harry Vaughan, *Baronite*, as given by Jem Halloway, you are so, 'werry 'airy about the gills!' Did you ever see anything half so hairy, Soph? bearded like the pard!"

"Well, now I look at you more attentively, you *are* getting bald, Eric," said I.

"Old age, Soph, old age!" he replied, half regrettingly, half pleasantly, at the same time casting his eyes round the room. "You seem to have got very comfortable quarters here," he continued, "judiciously arranged and tastefully furnished; I see you want some of my help towards filling the spaces on the walls, though. I thought you'd be short of pictures, so I've

brought some, of my own daubs with me, besides a few better ones: you can choose from among them, all sorts of subjects ready cut and dried; they only want stretchers and frames."

"Where are they, Eric? I should like to see them," said Ernie.

"Not to-night, my dear fellow, it's impossible; they are all rolled up in canvas: look at them in the morning."

"Talking of pictures, I've a capital room for you to paint in, Eric," cried Ernest; "come and see it."

"Very well, let us adjourn and inaugurate it with a weed," was the ready response. "I suppose, Soph, you won't mind the smoke. You used not to object to it in times gone by, when I and Max——"

"Oh, Count Max," I interrupted, "what is he doing? I never thought to ask after that worthy individual until this moment; here, light your cigar. What is Count Max doing?"

"Doing nothing: he is very well, as fat as a mole, and about as sleek and somnolent; he is married, and in fact quite snuffed out."

"Married," exclaimed Ernie, in a tone of astonishment; "I thought that Sophie was ——"

"Never mind what you thought," I interposed, hastily; "let us hear a little more of what Eric has been about, and is doing now."

"Oh, I have been as busy as a bee," was his answer; "and I have not nearly completed all the pictures for which I have commissions. *Per bacco*, what a capital room this is; why, my dear coz, its the very thing I want. Ernest, what a studio this will make."

"*Per baccy*! you had better say, for this is no end of a good cigar you have given me."

"And so the Brownie has returned to old England once more," I remarked. "I shall be so glad to see him again; when do you think he will call?"

"The Brownie! Of course you mean Colonel Arden; but why the deuce do you call him 'the Brownie?'" Giving a man a sobriquet always suggests the idea of a close intimacy, and you can't have known very much of him. You have known me pretty intimately for a good many years, and you never applied one to me, which makes this the



more remarkable. He's nothing to brag of that *I* can see."

"Oh," I replied, "when we met him he was so tanned, and had a large brown buffalo robe, that we gave him the nickname of the 'Brownie' among ourselves; but of course he knew nothing about it."

"You seem, however, to have struck up a tolerably lasting acquaintance, if it was not an intimacy, in the short space of time you were together, Soph; for not only do you seem to have retained a vivid remembrance of him, but he was tenderly solicitous in his inquiry after you."

These remarks of Eric's were couched in a tone of voice which evidently betrayed a feeling of pique; and, fool that I was, I felt rather pleased at it. I felt a vague sense of pleasure in being able to rouse jealousy in that apparently impervious soul of his: and yet, had I reflected for a moment, I might have known that it was no feeling of real jealousy which prompted his inquiry. No; he was only true to the instincts of his sex.

How constant in the mouths of men is the remark, that "women never cordially praise each

other;" that admiration expressed of a woman, to a woman is invariably met by faint praise, or cynical criticism; that even the smallest meed of approval is always dashed by some deteriorating "if" or "but."

This may or may not be true: whether it be so or not, I will not stop to argue; but of this I am certain, that men bear with infinitely less equanimity a woman's praise of man, let the friendship or even relationship which prompt it be near, remote, or non-existent.

Do you doubt the truth of this weighty charge, my unobservant female friend? Do you, too, cast a doubt upon it, my calm, objective, aspersion-hating masculine reader? If so, your doubts can be very easily dissipated: as the quack advertiser of a miraculous hair dye would inform you with regard to his nostrum, "one trial will prove the fact."

Let the subject of your ill-advised approval be tall or short, fair or dark, married or single, stolid or intellectual, mirthful or morose, and, if you be a woman, descant upon his merits warmly to your father, brother, husband, lover, cousin, or mere acquaintance, "and make a note" of the response:

mark well if it be not damaging, deteriorating, perhaps detestable.

To return, however, to Eric and his inquiries, whence I have been unthinkingly led by my proneness to indulge in reflections such as these.

"You see, Eric; we knew Colonel Arden pretty well: that is, not *long*, but *much*. The merry, open-air, unconventional life we passed in the Isle of Man, to say nothing of his agreeable manners and the assistance he rendered us at the fire, created an intimacy and interest in each other's fate which a dozen years of tepid town life could never have promoted."

My only hope of extrication from this uneasy explanatory conversation rested in being able to turn the subject towards one in which my catechist felt a stronger interest, so, seizing the opportunity which the extinction of his cigar afforded, I gave him a light, accompanying it by the inquiry as to what he was then painting.

This was more than sufficient for my purpose; away he bounded on his hobby-horse, and a most delightful mental quadruped it was, as I well knew of old. Painting led to painters, art to literature,

literature to anecdotes of literary men whom he had met in Rome and Paris; of society, men, women, manners, and customs, all deeply interesting, and needing nothing but the glorious disorder of the dear old room at Daundelyonn, the easel, the paint-stained table, the dais, and artist's chair, with Count Max in the corner enveloped in a cloud of hot tobacco smoke, and Firmilian (long since gathered to his fathers) purring contentedly on the hearth-rug, to make one feel assured that it was but the continuation of conversations in which there had been no interruptions, no violent severances, and no disasters to break their absorbing interest.

Under the influence of this thought, I was upon the point of introducing the subject of all that had passed since our last intellectual gathering, and which had been lost sight of in the novelty of everything around us, when Ernie, long since quite out of his depth, having wisely found refuge in sleep, awakened with a violent snort, and suddenly looking at his watch, sprang up, uttering the ejaculation—

“By Jove, half-past one, I declare. You two

chatterboxes would gossip on till daylight. I'm off to bed. Eric, are you not tired? By Jove, I am; there are your candles."

"Yes," said Eric, "now you put me in mind of it, I do feel stiff—we'll adjourn the conference until another night."

"I'm only sorry its over," I replied; "but, I suppose, we must go. Good-night." And retiring to bed in Indian file, I felt happy in the knowledge that we were once more under the same roof; how long to remain so I did not care to speculate.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## OLD AND NEW FACES.

"What's love? you ask; why love at best  
Is only a delightful jest;  
As sad for one, as bad for three,  
So I suggest you jest with me."

*Locker's London Lyrics.*

THE next morning at breakfast, a very late one by the by, we arranged our plans for the day. Ernest had several engagements, put off in the bustle of removing from Park Lane, which could be delayed no longer; Eric, too, had a few parcels and letters to deliver, as well as some commissions to execute, which would occupy the best part of the day, so we agreed to dine at seven o'clock: until then each might do as they pleased.

"Well then," said Ernie, "seven's the hour;

but let us be punctual." (This invitation to punctuality sounded rather oddly in the mouth of a man who was notoriously either too early or too late for everything.) "Whatever we do, let us name an hour, and stick to it: let us begin as we mean to go on," cried he.

"Agreed," said Eric, "so let it be; until then, adieu."

"Good-bye, old boy, until seven," echoed Ernest, vanishing.

Eric looked after him with a sigh: "Ernie is very little altered, Soph; the same off-hand manner, the same elasticity of spirits, his very face is unaltered, save by the moustache: how different to the rest of us."

"Do you think me so much altered, then? I asked, quickly.

Eric looked hard at me, with one of his old incomprehensible looks. I bore the scrutiny bravely; at last he said, quietly, but with a peculiar smile—

"Altered! humph! well you are greatly changed, of course; but I think I should have known you again: am I also recognizable, Cugina?"

“I think my old eyes could have discovered you, even without my spectacles, Eric.”

In a moment his whole tone and manner altered: just one of the strange rapid changes I remembered so well of old.

“Altered, Soph! Are you altered? are we not all changed? have we not had sad and sufficient cause for it? My poor child, my poor dear patient little pet! how could you bear the brunt of the battle as you did, and come off gloriously as you have done, without a scar or scratch. Yes, Soph, you are altered: you are not the bright-eyed, blooming girl I recollect perched in the Donjon Tower at Daumdelyonn; that tall and womanly form is not the light childish figure I disguised so well beneath the doublet of the goblin page. Your cheek is paler, your brow sadder, your eye deeper, both in colour and expression. Yes; you are altered, Soph; much altered, much improved: you have now gained just what you wanted, *shadow*. I speak like a painter, don’t I; talk shop? But, oh! Soph, for myself, look at my bald head, my wizened face, my stunted figure; am I not a deplorable object, a mere miserable dried



specimen of humanity? What are you laughing at, you witch: don't you pity me?"

"Exceedingly, only your tone of voice reminded me ——"

"Of what? I insist on knowing," cried Eric, pinning me into a corner.

"Oh, only of a very agreeable man I once met, a friend of Colonel Arden's ——" I suppose I ought not to record it, but I caught a smothered exclamation of Eric's, which sounded very much like "d—— Colonel Arden." I pretended however *not* to hear it, and enquired what he had got in those monstrous packing cases.

"Trash! pictures," muttered Eric, sulkily.

"And in this dirty little box?"

"Paints, brushes, varnish, messes of all sorts."

"Why don't you unpack them, and get them out of the way?"

"I suppose I must, by and by; *ay de mi!* what a job it will be."

"Why not let Davis do it for you? He is a capital hand at such matters."

"Let him touch it at his peril. No; I'll do it to-morrow, or next day. What! is that twelve

o'clock! how time flies; I must go. I have a parcel and letter of introduction to deliver to Lord Cloyne. Where does he live?—they have no direction on them—just look.”

“I took down the Blue Book, and read—“ Earl of Cloyne, Viscount Donaghadee, the Ladies Almeria and Heloisa Dundrum, 292, Upper Grosvenor Street, and Castle Poteen, Ireland.”

“That’s the address I want, Soph. They are most agreeable, unaffected people; I knew them well abroad; I’ll go at once. Where are my gloves?”

“Are they handsome?” I asked, absently.

“What, my gloves? not particularly; they were lovely in their youth, but now come under the denomination of the “has beens.”

I smiled: “No; I was speaking of the Ladies Dundrum; are they pretty, Eric?”

“No, Soph, not pretty; they are only good-looking, fine, showy, healthy animals, all life and spirits; blue eyes, red hair, big hands, huge feet, broad backs, and snowy shoulders.”

“And Lord Cloyne, Eric?”

“The papa? I never saw him; he is bed-ridden,

I believe, and never leaves Castle Poteen. Donaghadee is a handsome fellow, full of fun and frolic."

"Well, you had better start at once, Eric. They'll be out, if you don't go early."

"Oh, any time before two o'clock will do; but nevertheless I'm off: *au revoir*."

No sooner had he turned the corner than I was down upon my knees before the box of paints and brushes; it was not locked, a turn-screw soon opened it; and I began slowly to unpack it; the bottles were rather dirty and very sticky, but I persevered and soon emptied it of its contents.

My next care was to arrange them all on the table and mantel-piece in the new studio, in the order, or rather disorder, in which they were in the habit of displaying themselves at Daundelyonn; my memory was good, my organ of locality strong, so in half an hour I had put all to rights. The next process was darkening the windows, arranging the platform for sitters, robing the lay figures, and placing them in grotesque attitudes; this also was speedily accomplished.

What should be my next employment? for the spirit of physical activity was strong upon me; once fairly off in an occupation requiring mere animal exertion, good-bye to all power of reading or fixing myself down to any tranquil task until nature would endure the burden imposed upon her no longer: such had been my habit from childhood. Well then, what next? Why, open and arrange that box of books. Flushed, dusty, and breathless I was busily engaged in investigating its contents, when a voice at my elbow said—

“I am afraid Miss Denne has forgotten an old friend!”

Absorbed in my new vocation of Librarian, and inquisitive to ascertain the style of literature in which Eric found delight, I had not heard Davis announce a visitor, and was consequently completely taken by surprise.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Denne; you are busy,” murmured the same voice: “I disturb you.”

“Colonel Arden!” I exclaimed, starting up.  
“Indeed I have not forgotten you: I am very

glad indeed to see you again; and I *would* shake hands with you, only—only——” and I held up my hands covered with paint, dust, and varnish by way of explanation.

Colonel Arden seized and shook them heartily; his own trembled perceptibly: a red flush was evident even beneath the tawny brown of his cheek and brow; his lips quivered.

How catching is emotion! I felt the tears welling into my own eyes at the sight of the suspicious moisture in his.

“Sit down; pray, sit down,” I said, almost pushing him at the same time into a chair: “I am so glad to see you. I wish Florence were here; she would be glad too; she has six children now: you know Mrs. Grey——” I was talking on without knowing very well what I said, for the sight of the Brownie’s pleasant sunburnt features conjured up so many scenes and faces that I felt as though in another moment I should be quite overcome. His next question put the finishing stroke to my bewilderment.

“And your eldest sister, Miss Angelica, is she married too?”

I tried to answer him in words, but my voice failed me, and pointing mutely to the black dress I wore, I burst into a passionate flood of tears.

The poor Brownie, with the tears standing in his own honest eyes, tried vainly to soothe me.

"Dear Miss Denne: Sophie, my dear friend, I never heard! how could I know? I would sooner have died than distress you. But that beautiful creature! how could I suspect? Good God! how awful! how sad!"

"Dear Colonel Arden, say no more," I replied, recovering myself: "it is very childish of me to give way thus; but I have had too much lately to try my strength, and I fear it is failing me at last: it is not your fault."

"I will obey you; we will speak of other things;" said Arden, with an effort to appear cheerful. "And your brother Odo, he is well?"

"Otho, you mean. Yes, he is well; has married an heiress and is fast becoming a millionaire, I believe: by the way, at his wedding I met an old acquaintance of yours."

"Indeed!" replied Arden, "what was his name?"

"It is very strange, but I never knew it. I forgot to ask at the time, and have never met him since."

"How then am I to recognise him?" asked the Brownie.

"Very easily, I think," was my reply. "He is an oddity: one not easily to be forgotten;" and I then proceeded to give a full description of my Drybridge partner.

Arden's face became radiant with pleasure. "I know him," said he; "I should know him among a thousand. You are quite right, Miss Denne; there is no mistaking him: there, are not two Richmonds in the field!"

"Is *his* name Richmond?" I inquired.

"Yes; Ralph Richmond; the best fellow in the world: he is as good as he is odd," was his reply, "and that is saying something. I have known him many—many years; before his father died, before I married. Why do you look suddenly so grave, Miss Sophie?"

(I was thinking of the fatal tune, and of his

wife's death, but turned the subject). The next moment a carriage stopped at the door, and Eric entered, followed by a tall, good-looking stranger, whom he introduced as Lord Donaghadee; at the same time vouchsafing a qualified recognition accompanied with a tolerably hearty shake of the hand, to Arden.

"I am sorry if I intrude upon ye, Miss Denne," said his Lordship, with a most decided and very unctuous brogue, "but I was anxious to see me frind here safe home, through the *purils* and dangers of London; to-morrow, me *sisthers* will do themselves the *plisure* of calling on ye, if ye'll allow thim."

I expressed myself honored by their intention, assured his Lordship that he did not intrude, and turning to Colonel Arden, reminded him of the pleasure it would be to me to introduce him to my brother Ernest.

Desiring to be kindly remembered to Florence and Otho, he took his leave; not without however claiming permission to call again.

The Viscount still lingered. He was rather amusing and very good-natured, although perhaps



not quite so good-tempered: there was something in his manner indicating a choleric temperament, an impression which his ruddy *crepés* crop of true Milesian hair did not by any means tend to diminish. I should have liked him well enough if he had not had a disagreeable trick of staring violently. I don't think he took his eyes off me for two minutes: large, round, wide-open, bright blue eyes, without much expression of any kind, but still disconcerting from their steadfast, fatiguing gaze. Having exhausted his witticisms, and quite outstayed his welcome, he, too, departed; leaving as a temporary souvenir the assurance of the delight it would be both to his sisters and himself to make my acquaintance on the morrow.

True to his promise, Lord Donaghadee and his two sisters called on the day following. The Ladies Almeria and Heloisa answered well to the description given of them by Eric; they were indeed healthy, blue-eyed, broad-shouldered women, with an atmosphere of rude animal electricity about them which was almost oppressive: they seemed to have been reared in a domain which afforded full development to naturally Amazonian

proportions, and the affluence of their health, breadth, and vivacity made me feel unpleasantly diminutive and feeble: besides, until their entrance, I was not aware of the limited dimensions of our rooms.

They were almost affectionately polite in their manner towards me, his Lordship more particularly so; but their evident impatience to see Eric's pictures plainly showed that, however anxious they might have been to make the acquaintance of two humble individuals like Ernest and myself, it was Eric and his supposed powers of portrait-painting which were the chief attractions.

"Indeed, thin, they're quite wonderful!" exclaimed Lady Almeria.

"Ye've immense talent at the painting, Mr. Denne," continued Lady Heloisa. "Could ye take our porthraits now, think ye? Papa would be so delithed if ye would."

Eric protested that portrait-painting was not his "forte;" it was a branch of art to which he had not directed sufficient attention to enable him to attempt to take likenesses.

"Shure ye're joking, Mr. Denne," exclaimed Lord Donaghadee, "if ye can painth one thing ye can another: what's the differince between a Vulcan and a Vanus but the colour? and ye've got all thim in the little bottles yonder."

Eric attempted an elaborate explanation of the difference between historical and portrait painting, which was quite lost upon his audience; for they laughed and protested that "Shure! and it was only his modesty."

Again and again did Eric endeavour to parry the point, but to no purpose: they were determined, and would take no denial.

"Indeed, thin, ye must thry: ye will thry, Mr. Denne?" exclaimed both ladies in a softly wheedling tone.

"It is impossible to refuse your Ladyships," replied Eric, "but I assure you the attempt will prove a failure."

"When will ye commince, thin?" inquired Lord Donaghadee; "if ye'll name a day we'll be contint to abide by it."

Eric looked towards me for council; he was now fairly fixed.

I suggested about the middle of next week; though why I proposed the middle rather than the beginning or end, I know not: perhaps there was a pleasant vagueness in the prospect of a period without a well-defined beginning or end.

"Well, thin, say Thursday?" said his Lordship; "that's a delightful day: just the very heart of the week!"

"Very well," replied Eric, "if you will do me the honour to call on Thursday, we will have the first sitting; but I must remind your Ladyships that I really know nothing about portrait-painting."

These scions of the House of Cloyne had scarce taken their departure when Eric lapsed into a brown study.

"A penny for your thoughts, Eric, as you used to say to me in time gone by."

"Why, Soph, it is early days to commence all the miseries of getting bread by portrait-painting: it is the very dregs of art. The thought of it is detestable; and, even if I did not dislike it, these are not the style of women I desire to immortalize on canvas: they are too well-bred to be vulgar,

but they are essentially animals without refinement: indeed I have seen scores of animals with more of it in their appearance."

"Well, Eric, but if the Fates decree that you *must* paint to live, surely portrait-painting pays best, and you must be content to look upon the lucrative side of the question. Suppose you succeed in this first essay, of which I feel certain, and the picture is well hung in the Academy, your fortune is made, and then you can resume historical subjects at any time."

"Fortunes are not so easily made, Soph: and yet, perhaps you are right;" this he said with a smile, for the suggestion as to appearing in the Academy evidently flattered him and gilded the otherwise distasteful occupation.

"Yes!" said he, after a moment's pause, "it *must* be done: but I prefer more mind, if it brings less macaroni."

Thursday saw the Dundrums once more at the door. I was employed upon some household arrangements when they came, and was not aware of their advent until Eric rushed into the room.

"Soph," said he, "you must leave what you

are about and come to the rescue; I shall go crazy if you don't."

"What is the matter, Eric?"

"Why those people are here, dressed in most gorgeous apparel, enough to scare all one's wits away; come and see if you can't tone them down a little, you can extemporize something: they are positively purring with pleasure at the thought of the figure they cut. Monstrous! it is very well it's a first sitting; had it been the last, I must have ripped the canvas."

Their appearance was certainly distressing, for they were clad in ball dresses, with all sorts of elaborate trimming; hair wrought into formal curls, and jewels everywhere.

After many trite apologies for my interference, a good deal of pinning up and tucking in, a little judicious draping, a loosening of tresses, and the addition of some of poor Aunt Barbara's rich point lace, they were made more presentable, and the first sitting was concluded.

When the formidable phalanx had once more departed, Eric with a heavy sigh, again appealed to me—

"And now how shall I dispose the adjuncts? What shall be the back-ground?"

"The terrace at home," I replied, at once; "you have plenty of sketches of Daundelyonn, make *that* your back-ground."

"Good," said he, "so let it be; old memories will sweeten the task, Soph."

The picture progressed more favourably than he had anticipated; by degrees he became interested in his subject. The Ladies Dundrum were lively, witty, unaffected girls, full of fun and merriment, and no one looked forward to the days for their sittings with more pleasure than did Ernest; who with one of his miserable *jeu de mots*, declared that the Dundrums were anything but humdrums.

The really handsome though somewhat coarse features of Eric's models were etherealized into a refinement which they certainly did not possess, and with which they were therefore proportionately enchanted; while the piquante, unconventional costumes in which we had arrayed them elicited tokens of unqualified praise: the likenesses too, were startling; such indeed as to

command the attention of every eye; and the sunset light which threw a special glow and glory upon the dearly-remembered terrace-walk, added not a little to the charm for me. I felt proud of the work, and certain of its success; the only regret we all experienced was when it was finished.

For once the merit of a painting by an unknown artist found a worthy place on the walls of that hideous edifice styled *par excellence* "the Academy." All the world prated of that wonderful picture "hung on the line," called "Sunset on the Terrace, with portraits of the Ladies Dundrum;" it brought them into a celebrity which they could never otherwise have achieved: it gave them rank among the "Belles of the Season," and it made Eric's fortune.

Poor Eric! despite the influx of gold to his coffers, long and loud were his regrets over the degeneracy of an age in which people set more store by representations of their own silly faces than on the finest efforts of genius.

"Never mind, Eric," Ernest would say, "daub them all round; make money, my boy, as fast as you can, and then paint what you please."



"Yes, dear Eric," I urged, "show the world that for once a man of genius may be a man of sense; paint portraits, if they pay best. You need hardly blush to follow in the footsteps of Vandyke; be sure that true talent, true poetic feeling will make itself manifest as well in one 'genre' as another. Paint portraits then, which will pay you; only let them be *pictures* as well as *likenesses*, and they will bring you fame as well as money."

"How easy it is to talk, Soph, when you have all the common sense on your side: but will you show me how to idealise the Lady Mayoress? She is anxious to aid native talent, she weighs sixteen stone, has three chins, a wig, and the weight of fifty-five summers; how, in her case, am I to combine the likeness and the picture?"

"Well, if you really *cannot* poeticize her ladyship and Turtle Hall, if you cannot be felicitous with her fat and feathers, plead numerous engagements; in a few months, perhaps a fairer form may reign in her stead."

"So I will, Soph, and I'll use Donaghadee's name as the stop-gap. By the by I am to take another chalk sketch of *him*; this makes about

the fourth. I think he is rather fond of coming here to have his portrait taken, eh, Soph?"

The tone of his voice reduced me to silence: there was an implied suspicion in it which scared reply or remark from my lips, for it was founded on truth. Although his Lordship was by no means the manner of man for whom I would have "exchanged my maiden gladness," or sadness, as the case might be, yet I had more than once good cause to suspect that he came among the prairies of Pimlico from other motives than merely to have his portrait taken.

"How wonderfully silent you are all at once, Soph! Your tongue ran on eloquently enough just now, but Donny's name seems to have acted like a spell."

"I don't quite understand you, Eric," I replied, colouring.

"Perhaps not—possibly not, but *I* quite understand the situation: and I see how the figures should be grouped!"

Still I was silent; for I felt hurt, angry, and mortified that Eric could joke upon such a subject with me.

"I have seen it from the first," he continued; "of course, *you* were not so wide awake: love is blind, you know."

"I detest these sort of jokes," I replied, angrily; "they are but sorry fun."

"I am not joking, Sophie, I am perfectly serious."

"So am I, Eric, and I beg you will change the subject."

Ernest's entrance here put an end to the conversation, which I firmly resolved should never again be resumed; and for once I kept my resolution.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## A TRIPTYCH.

"I hear from others gentle words,  
 I scarcely heed the while;  
 Listened to but with weariness,  
 Forgotten with a smile.

"But these, though chance and casual words,  
 Are treasured as we keep  
 Things lovely, precious, and beloved,  
 On which we watch and weep."

L. E. L.

IN a round of pleasurable excitement, as novel as it was captivating, the summer glided away; and winter came to a close, heralding in another spring, which brought fresh laurels for Eric: the unknown painter of a year ago now became a desideratum at all parties affecting pretension. At the opera, Lord Donaghadee always took care that, at least on two nights out of three, Lord Cloyne's box should be at our disposal; and with

the first flicker of spring-time sunlight, as it quivered through the pale chrysolite leaves of the trees, came excursions to Bushey Park, Richmond, Chiswick, with occasional dinners at Greenwich and picnics to Box Hill: indeed, expeditions of some sort were for ever being planned and for ever "coming off." We had contrived by this time gradually to draw together a pleasant circle of warm friends and sparkling acquaintances, not belonging exclusively to any one order or set, but a pleasing mixture of all kinds and classes. I never was so happy or so contented; the only drawback was a kind of inactive jealousy on Eric's part towards Lord Donaghadee and Colonel Arden. I say inactive jealousy, advisedly, for although as a general rule he was ready to join in all our amusements, yet fits of jealous reticence would occasionally steal over him without any apparent cause.

"Why, Eric, you said that you would go with us to Greenwich to-morrow; what can be the reason for your crying off just at the eleventh hour?"

"Oh, *you* don't want *me*; you have plenty of

people to flirt with: besides I have abundance of work at home; we can't always be gadding about."

"But surely your absence will seem strange!"

"Oh, make any excuse you like for me."

"What excuse *can* I make? They know you are not ill, and you have no more work to do now than when you agreed to go?"

"Very well, I'll go," he would reply, sulkily; "but *you* can do very well without *me*."

And he went, but maintained so determined a silence, and looked so discontented, that his absence would have been a relief.

Notwithstanding these occasional drawbacks, my happiness was indeed great; and sometimes in its contemplation I shuddered to think of the future, and how all this joy might terminate. During the winter, Eric had stolen a visit to his father at Minster, of whom he brought back but a poor account; trouble and distress of mind had done their work: he was little better than childish; mistook Eric for Harold, and could not be convinced that they were not the same person. The Twins had become quite old women; Phœbe, however, looked well and contented.

I promised myself a visit when summer came, and Eric and Ernest could spare me; in the meantime taking advantage of Eric's absence, we invited Miss Crockett to occupy his room.

Dear little Jenny Wren! how glad I was to see her once more! She showed no token of advancing years: I believe Father Time had given her up as an incorrigible, and refused to have any intercourse with her; face, figure, dress, mirth, everything was unaltered.

She was very speedily installed as first favourite with Lord Donaghadee; a preference which to my surprise she fully reciprocated.

"I like him, my dear," she remarked to me, in her quick impulsive manner; "he is none of your washed-out, inane 'men about town;' he is quite crisp and refreshing: I hate *limp* people: besides, he is decidedly good-looking, and I confess to having had all my life long a weakness for good looks: I have been a worshipper of beauty; perhaps, because I never had any myself. I see you don't agree with me, Sophie; you don't admire him."

"Not a bit—I like him well enough; but as for

*admiring* him, how can I admire anything half so uninteresting ; there is nothing in him to *discover* : one knows such a man as well in an acquaintance of a week, as in a friendship of twenty years."

"He is open-hearted and open-handed too," said Jenny Wren, warmly, in a tone of championship which showed that she had left her stock of shrewd discrimination at Redleaf.

"I quite grant all that," I replied ; "and if not tempered with good judgment, both are fatal qualities."

"He is good nature itself, Sophie," said Miss Crockett.

"He need be so, with such a hasty temper," I retorted.

"Ah ! Sophie, it is very easy to see which way the cat jumps with you," and here she shook her small head ominously ; "the fact is, you are so infatuated with that musical, mystical, mesmerizing cousin of yours, that you can see no merit in any one else : I have no patience with Eric."

"You used to like him once, poor fellow," said I, reproachfully.

"Poor fellow !" cried Miss Crockett, "why is



he to be 'poor-fellowed,' I should like to know? A dog in a manger, that's what *he* is. Poor-fellow *him*, indeed! I never heard such nonsense! 'Poor-fellow' Lord Donaghadee if you like, or 'poor-fellow' Colonel Arden; there would be some sense in that!"

"Ah! he is a bird of altogether another feather," I answered. "Colonel Arden is a man of refinement, naturally more polished than his Lordship; he has travelled far and wide, and if he ever had any rough points they have long since been rubbed away; besides being good-looking, if not handsome, he sings with taste, and has a deferential manner towards us women which is sure to enlist our sympathies in his behalf. He has moreover a peculiarly interesting reticence of manner upon certain subjects, which betokens his being 'a man with a history,' which is in itself sufficiently captivating; and I am sure you will acknowledge that he is a good listener."

"That's true, my love," confessed Miss Crockett, "he is indeed an intelligent and delightful auditor. One laughs *at* Lord Donaghadee, but one laughs *with* Colonel Arden, while Eric seems always to

be laughing *at one*; and that is not agreeable. Soph," she added, after a pause, "I wonder which of us, I mean Lord Donaghadee or myself, he laughs at most, eh?"

"Dear Miss Crockett, Eric would not ——"

"My love," she rejoined, "you need not excuse him. I have not lived all these years in the world without being fully aware of my own weak points; but I could not alter now, it is too late: besides, what does it signify? I make others laugh at me, and I laugh at others—at Lord Donaghadee for instance, for being a 'great big bumping bosthoon,' as his countrymen would call him; but nevertheless he is a favourite of mine: his oddities are new to me at present, but I dare say that I should tire of him in time."

"I should have wearied of him long ago, dear Miss Crockett; but—the dinners—the picnics—the opera box!"

"Ay, I see, my love," was her response. "It is a case of give-and-take; he gives the dinners and you take the box. Ah! Sophie—Sophie! I see that town life has taught you something."

"Alas! dear Miss Crockett, I fear you speak no more than the truth; the waters of the world possess petrifying qualities, turning everything they touch into stone."

"Is that a *proverb*?" inquired my companion, quickly.

"Not that I know of," I replied; "why do you ask?"

"Because it had the *twang* of one," remarked Miss Crockett; "but I thought it could not be one either: it is too true. Well my child, I leave you to-morrow, and your dear 'dog in a manger' returns the next day. Do what you will, you will have to accept or refuse one of those three men before six months are over: you can't drive them 'unicorn' for ever, so think seriously about it, and make up your mind as to which it is to be."

"Which shall it be?" I inquired, smilingly. "Advise me."

"My dear, no—I couldn't; I'll give you all the assistance I can, at any time, or in any way, but no advice: I never either give advice or take it—upon principle."

The truth of Miss Crockett's observation had long been too evident to me to admit of dispute. I had vainly tried to delude myself into the belief that my fears were only founded on overweening vanity, and that at all events there was safety in a multitude of admirers; but Miss Crockett's practical suggestion as to the impossibility of continuing to drive "unicorn," completely dispelled any latent subterfuge, which might have still remained as a sort of last hope. She returned to Redleaf after a pleasant visit, promising to repeat it again and again.

Eric's disquietude, the attentions of Lord Donaghadee, and Colonel Arden's partiality became too evidently antagonistic to be controlled; while the whirl of life in which we lived blunted my feelings and bewildered my brain.

I determined, therefore, before taking any final step, to leave London, with its distracting din, its pleasures, and its cares, and take counsel with myself in the pure air and quiet of the country. I would once more visit the loved and lost home of my childhood; there in the silence and solitude of its deserted halls, would I commune with my

own heart, and seek courage, and the inspiration to direct my choice of a lot in life.

In the meantime the days flew by, the moment for action was lost in procrastination, and on one Thursday morning, while arranging a few roses in the studio, as a wreath for that night's opera, the storm burst.

"Here's a letter for you," said Eric, as he entered to commence painting, at the same time throwing rather a bulky packet into my lap.

I at once recognised the handwriting to be that of Colonel Arden, while its size assured me that it was no invitation, or mere *billet de cérémonie*. I felt at the moment as though Eric had thrown a serpent among my flowers. Open it, I could not, for I knew that his "eye was upon me;" I resolved to wait until alone—although dreading every moment lest Eric should remark upon my apparent want of curiosity. It would only have been in accordance with the usual disposition of events in such cases that Eric should have remained as if nailed to his seat for hours; but singular to say, he offered no remark, and left the room in a few moments in search of some

artistic adjunct to the picture in course of execution. The door closed, and I tore open the letter. As I suspected, it *was* an offer from Colonel Arden. Plain, manly, touching, in the unaffected simplicity of its deeply tender tone: he avowed that from our first meeting he had regarded me with feelings of more than common interest and affection, feelings which, although checked at the time, only sprang up again with greater force when on returning to this country, a kind Providence had again thrown him in my path, to find me still unaltered and unfettered.

Poor Arden, I will not dwell longer upon his letter than to say that it was one which no woman could read and yet remain unmoved: all the greater points in his character, marshalled themselves in prominent array; his unselfishness, his warmth of heart, his sincerity, his simplicity, his unassuming talents; and as the "field" of telescopic memory expanded more and more, taking in one pleasurable reminiscence after another, I felt the tears falling fast upon the rose-wreath which my trembling fingers had ceased to arrange. At the approach of

Eric's returning footstep, I busied myself once more with the flowers; doubting in my own mind whether he was not completely master of the position; whether he had not suspected the truth, and left the room to enable me to peruse the epistle, only to tease me with suggestions as to its contents, on his return. Ten years of life were exhausted in those ten minutes of anticipation. At last Eric broke the silence.

"Why, Soph," said he, in a tone of voice, almost, but not quite reassuring; "are you an enchantress, that you are trying to breathe a soul into those blossoms? you remind me of Namouna, when,

'—in a kind of holy trance  
She hung above those fragrant treasures  
Bending to drink their balmy airs,  
As if she mixed her soul with theirs.'

The time had been when his quotation would have received an instant reply, also in verse; and I rather expected a taunt for being dull, when he relieved my anxiety and embarrassment by chanting in a low, unearthly sort of tone—

"The wreath you wove, the wreath you wove  
Is fair—but oh! how fair,  
If pity's hand had stolen from love  
One leaf to mingle there!

"If every rose with gold were tied,  
Did gems for dew-drops fall,  
One faded leaf where love had sigh'd  
Were sweetly worth them all."

"Do you know what I am thinking of now?"  
he inquired.

"No; how is it possible, Eric?"

"A poor enchantress you are, not to be able  
to divine a simple mortal's thoughts. I am think-  
ing of the first time I saw you, bending over  
the fountain at Daundelyonn on the night I  
arrived: do you remember?"

Did I remember! should I ever forget! "Yes,"  
was my reply; "I remember it, Eric."

"So do I, Sophie," and again he murmured  
in a suppressed voice—

"There's not a look, a word of thine,  
My soul hath e'er forgot;  
Thou ne'er hast bid a ringlet shine,  
Nor given thy locks one graceful twine,  
Which I remember not!"

What was the spell which bound me? what  
the charm he possessed? As he sung, Arden's



merits faded away, while the past, with all its witchery, became vividly present. How could I—how dare I hesitate? What! marry good, kind, noble-hearted Arden? give him the vague and divided affection of a heart, within whose depths was enshrined the idolized image of another? No, never! rather than so mock a noble-hearted gentleman, a brave soldier, I would live and die Sophie Denne.

My reply to Colonel Arden's letter was a refusal, couched in the kindest language my heart's vocabulary afforded. I tried to convert the lover into a friend: whether he would accept the terms, time alone would show. With what a heavy conflict-torn heart I prepared for "long Thursday" at the opera: the longest Thursday I ever endured. Tedious as was the interval between the acts, I tried to be calm and patient; but I fear I succeeded badly, for both Eric and Ernest left the box, to make some visits to surrounding acquaintances, leaving Lord Donaghadee, seated as usual in his favourite chair immediately behind mine. No sooner were they gone, than his solicitude on my account became excessive: he feared

that I felt the heat, that my seat was uncomfortable, that the curtain was in my way; he next became evidently dejected, then excitement supervened; and then, O horror of horrors! he became tender. At last the dreaded words were uttered. In his own odd, off-hand, tragi-comic style, which was ludicrously heightened by extreme nervousness, he offered his hand, his heart, his coronet, for my acceptance.

"Oh! no, no, no; not here, not now: to-morrow," I murmured.

"To-morrow! give me a hope to live on till thin, Miss Denne, or I'll go mad."

"I cannot, Lord Donaghadee. Spare me."

"Spare *me*, or I'll go mad," he replied; "it's killing me by inches to put me off in this way. May I hope, in time—only say one word—I'll do anything ye tell me—but one word—just one."

Thank heaven! at this critical moment, the box door opened, admitting Ernest, who was so full of gossip and excitement, and maintained such a running commentary upon all we saw and heard, that further allusion to the subject was impossible. Notwithstanding all the annoyance I had endured

during that day and evening, I could not help my attention being distracted by the occupant of a box nearly opposite in the tier above us. He was old, quite alone, and bore so strong a resemblance to Uncle Edward, that I was exceedingly startled, and my curiosity was roused so completely that I could not resist again and again gazing at him. The interest was evidently mutual, for he also scarcely once moved his eyes away from the spot where we were seated.

I began, as usual, to speculate upon the causes which could have led him to the opera, for he did not seem to be either interested with the performance or listening to the music : no, there he sat, pale, earnest, sorrowful, and motionless, his gaze steadfastly fixed upon us. Did we too resemble some distant dear ones? Did we recall to his mind the forms of those whom he had loved and lost?

A suppressed ejaculation on my part, as these thoughts crossed my mind, attracted Ernie's attention.

"What's the matter, Soph? What do you see? Who is it?"

"Uncle Edward," I replied; "I never saw such a likeness: look yourself."

"Where?" said he, sweeping the house with his glass; "I see no one like him."

"There, in the tier above us, just opposite; near the lady in pink you said was pretty: look again."

Ernie reconnoitred vainly: he could see no likeness.

"Let me set your glass to my focus," said I, "and then perhaps you may have better luck."

Once, twice, I swept the line of boxes, but without the semblance of the dear old man I loved so well coming into the field. Fancying that I had by accident directed the glass to the wrong tier, I removed it from my eye to correct the error; but he was gone. We also left the house shortly afterwards; Lord Donaghadee with pertinacious assiduity attending us to the last moment, and handing me into the carriage with a whispered admonition to "remember to-morrow."

In the excited state of my nerves every trifle became invested with undue importance: all night long in troubled dreams, I was writing endless letters to Arden, the ink of which would never

dry; wreathing endless roses which turned to cypress boughs as I interlaced them; and gazing upon the wild distorted likenesses of every friend and relative I had ever had; these several occupations being accompanied by a loud orchestra, performing with stunning vehemence the well-remembered military march which had sounded my father's death knell in my mother's ears, on that day in Park Lane when we thought her looking so kind and blooming, and she had played so strangely with our new toys.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## MINSTER.

"Ave Maria! blessed be the hour!

The time, the chime, the spot, where I so oft

Have felt that moment in its fullest power,

Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,

While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,

Or the faint dying day hymn stole aloft,

And not a breath crept through the rosy air,

And yet the forest leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer."

*Byron.*

TO-MORROW came, and with it the old sensation of anxious restlessness, the sure precursor of impending trouble; Miss Crockett's warning voice, too, rang in my ears, unaccompanied by the solace of knowing that I had been able to decide upon a fixed and wise course of action.

With regard to Lord Donaghadee, should I write or wait an interview? Instinct in Colonel Arden's case had told me at once that a letter

was the proper mode of conveying an affectionate refusal; but as to this impulsive Irishman, I doubted whether any process, short of morally knocking him down, would relieve me from further importunity: and yet how could I convey my determination in sufficiently strong language by letter? On the other hand, I dreaded an interview at home, lest it should lead to some misunderstanding or uneasy collision between himself and Eric, which by possibility might injure the latter's professional prospects.

By the time I had finished my toilette it wanted yet an hour to breakfast, so I sat down to think, hoping to be able to hammer out some reasonable resolve. At last I came to the conclusion to *write*; not by any means feeling satisfied that it was the best course, but yet impelled thereto for Eric's sake. And how should the letter be framed? how word it so that I might rid myself of a lover, yet retain a patron for my cousin?

I hope I wrote kindly and gratefully; I am sure that I did so firmly, earnestly, for my heart went with my pen. I prayed him to permit me the pleasure of still retaining him as a kind and

generous friend, concluding my note with the suggestion that both the proposal with which he had honoured me and my reply should for ever remain a close secret between us.

The letter having been despatched by a trusty messenger before the two lazy boys were down, my mind was so far relieved from immediate anxiety as to enable me to meet them with a smiling face on taking my usual place at the breakfast-table ; although the foreboding of evil still weighed heavily on my spirits.

The plans for the day were soon settled, and Ernie had delivered himself of his usual injunction as to dinner hour punctuality, which was the signal for Eric to throw the newspaper over to me with the stereotyped assurance that there was "nothing in it." Under other circumstances I might have taken him at his word ; but being unable to settle down to any occupation, by way of killing time I began resolutely to spell it through.

I soon became aware of the startling fact that "alewives were easy, pig-iron buoyant, and indigo a drug," all which strongly reminded me of Dry-



bridge. Then followed rivulets of railway shares, the weekly result of the observations of some weatherwise worthy upon the state of the wind and rain, and the wonderful effect produced upon a noble earl (not Lord Cloyne) by the free use of Holloway's pills.

These morsels of intelligence all perused, I thought Eric justified for once in his abrupt assertion that there was nothing in the paper; and was beginning to speculate upon whether Lord Donaghadee had got my note, and if so what he would say to it, when my eyes chanced to light upon the following paragraph, inserted in small type, as though it were a matter of little importance, but yet of convenient size for filling up a reluctant corner.

“The British barque *Orion*, in latitude — S. and longitude — W., whilst on her voyage from the coast of Peru to Australia, picked up in mid ocean a spar bearing the name *Atalanta*, with the broad arrow proving it to be the property of the Crown; this she has left at Deal on her passage to the river.” To which was appended an editorial foot note, “We do not remember to

have seen any public notice of the real or supposed loss of this *Atalanta*."

"Eric," said I, rushing into his studio, "Edwy has been drowned; read this. Now the cause of the poor fellow's silence is explained;" and the recollection of his appearance at the window of the Pavilion at Daundelyonn returned vividly.

Seizing the paper, Eric remarked that our not having heard from him for more than two years certainly might give some colour to the supposition that he was lost, but that the simple fact of one vessel finding the spar of another floating at sea was not of itself sufficient evidence; however, he would go at once to the Admiralty and seek some explanation. I in the meantime sent Davis off, on, I feared, a wild-goose chase after Ernest.

\* \* \* \* \*

"They seem to have no official intimation of the loss of the *Atalanta*," said Eric, on his return: "they don't seem to know much about it; but they suggested that possibly some misfortune might have befallen her, as they had received no returns for a long period. However, they

will write and let me know so soon as they have any reliable information to communicate."

"Depend upon it, Eric, she is gone to the bottom, and poor Edwy in her. I *saw* him on the night it happened; it was the day on which your father returned from Canterbury with the news of the bank having broken: I saw him just as I saw your mother at the 'Castle Mona.' What shall we do about telling your father, Eric?"

"Poor Edwy!" he replied, "and the poor old gentleman too, more trouble for him; it is almost a relief to think that he is well nigh past the day when any affliction can touch him deeply. Perhaps it will be better to say nothing until we hear from the Admiralty? Perhaps we had better send him the paper, so as to prepare his mind in some measure for the worst?"

"Let us wait until Ernest comes home," I suggested.

He came at last. "Wait, certainly wait," was his advice; "it may turn out a false alarm, and if so, what a pity to disturb the even tenor of their lives at Minster by such a horrible report.

Should it be true we will go down and break it personally to the dear old fellow. For every reason let us say nothing to him about it at present."

Alas! How vain were all our counsels, the very next post brought a hurried, blotted, and scarcely legible letter from Hilda, summoning Eric at once to Minster. Uncle Edward had been seized by a fit, had not spoken since, and the doctors thought very seriously of his case.

He had been reading the newspaper lent him by a neighbour, and when Phœbe took in the tea-things she found him lying with his face flat upon the ample page spread out before him on the table. He had been removed to his own room in a kind of lethargic stupor. Hilda added that the doctors had done all sorts of things to him, but he had not spoken intelligibly or opened his eyes for some time. Elfrida and herself were so frightened that Eric must come at once.

Off he started, promising to send for Ernest and myself if Uncle Edward were not much better on his arrival.

With what intense anxiety we waited for a letter ! It came at last. Uncle Edward was gone !

Gone so soon, so suddenly ; without one parting look or kiss for her who " had been to him as a daughter." Yet, no : while his spirit still hovered on the confines of eternity he had bestowed one parting look upon me : it was he whom I had seen at the opera. It appeared that for about an hour after Hilda had written to us, he continued in the same insensible condition, from which he suddenly roused up, and looking into Elfrida's face, who was bending over him, pointed to Phoebe, at the same time whispering faintly, " Take care of her : she has been a good girl to me," again relapsing into apparent unconsciousness ; whence he roused up speaking incoherently of his children, of Edwy especially, whose death he seemed perfectly convinced of ; then, after an agonizing suspense, he once more reared himself up in the bed, and exclaimed—

" Tell your mother I'm coming directly : you know she does not like to wait. Is Sophie ready ?"—sunk back upon his pillow, and was dead !

Is Sophie ready? How those last words thrilled through my heart, and echoed in my brain: weak, wicked, thoughtless, vain! was I ready? Lost in the whirl of life, amid its cares, its joys, its petty annoyances, and puny triumphs, was I ready? What! with such a course of preparation, ready to leave the world, freed from the assilment of its sins and manifold short-comings, ready for Death! ready for eternity!

Of what had I been thinking, what doing of late to prepare me for such an awful change? Setting up an earthly idol and worshipping it, to the exclusion of all that was higher and holier. Permitting myself to be "troubled after many things," in place of choosing "the one better part which would not be taken from me:" "laying up treasure for myself where moth and rust would corrupt and where thieves would break through and steal."

All this I had been doing, regardless of repeated warnings that this was no abiding place; and was I ready to follow father, mother, aunt, Angelica, Edwy, and now Uncle Edward? No! was the stern reply of conscience.

"Tremble then and prepare, else when the night cometh 'and the rain is on the roof,' an unrepentant spirit shall be borne shrieking to that realm wherein is outer darkness and the gnashing of teeth : and that spirit will be yours."

"Ernest," said I, "pray, take me down to Minster at once ; I cannot bear the thought of those two poor girls being left alone now that Uncle Edward is gone. What are they to do ? mere waifs and strays upon the wide waters of the world, without an aim or an occupation, they must not be left there."

"My dear Soph, you are not in a fit state at present to go anywhere ; you are all to pieces with nervous excitement, and can be of no sort of use down there, except to make matters worse. Stay here quietly while I go and help Eric ; when we return, you shall be taken into council as to what is to be done for Hilda and Elfrida. My own impression is that they will be far more in their element and more comfortable in a quiet place like Minster than in the hubbub of a city like this. Now be advised for once, and stay here quietly. I promise you that nothing shall be done without

your full knowledge. They have no room for you either; so be reasonable and make up your mind not to go."

Sorely against my will I consented, and with closed windows waited their return. What a comfort old Morgan was during that dreary period!

\* \* \* \* \*

The Twins had chosen to remain at Minster in charge of Phoebe; who, for special reasons of her own, besides affection for them, had greatly influenced their decision: she knew how completely strange they would feel when removed from all their old haunts and customary occupations. Miss. Crockett had volunteered to look after them; and if I would but promise to go down and see them now and then they would be perfectly contented.

"Then I'll go at once," said I. "I have duties to do down there which my soul sickens at the thought of having so long neglected." What had I promised Sir Brutus, and how had I kept my word? True, Miss Crockett had attended to everything for me; but was it enough to know that my



promise had been performed by deputy? The impossibility of giving myself a satisfactory answer to these questions showed me how much my heart had lost its tone, how utterly worldly I had become. I would at once cut short this thoughtless career.

"Now, Soph, we give you ten days' leave, and no more, remember," said Eric: "at the end of that time you must return, for you will be wanted here. If you don't return in ten days I am off elsewhere. I cannot live without you. I suppose you know that."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was on a calm lovely afternoon in summer that I paid the Twins my first visit.

The Isle of Thanet is not renowned for the splendour of its inland scenery. Gigantic headlands some hundreds of feet, "sheer down" into the boiling, seething ocean at their base, are the terrors of which it boasts, rather than the tranquil leafy beauty of majestic woods and soft, undulating downs. Yet there are some beautiful lanes and picturesque villages, where glorious old trees overshadow antique gabled farmhouses, and where

quaint grey churches possess among their archives such strange names, dates, and documents, as would gladden the heart of the most rabid antiquary.

The lanes leading to this village of Minster (the loveliest in the Isle of Thanet), with their flowery banks and deep shadowy overhanging trees, always seem to me more delightful, cool, and green than any others in England, from the startling contrast they afford to the heat and glare of the sunburnt cornfields and the restless glitter of the dazzling sea.

Rather than do violence to the quiet street by rattling through it in a jingling "fly," I descended from its drab-coloured moth-eaten seat; and, bidding the ragged nondescript of a driver (whose appearance partook largely of the compound of a farm-servant, a hanger-on about stables, a tramp, and a coachman out of place) to precede me towards the chief inn of which the village boasted, I leisurely followed, under the guidance of a little rosy urchin, with a shock head of curly hair bleached to a yellowish white by the combined influences of sun, wind, and

rain, who, voracious of pence, had willingly vouchsafed his services in some unknown dialect.

This house of entertainment for travellers, biped and quadruped, as its sign announced, was a very small tavern, with a very large garden, a great portion of which was covered with a gritty and unsatisfactory kind of gravel, and surrounded by rustic sheds intended to represent arbours; there was also a boarded area for nine-pins, a swing, and a small facetious-looking gallows, whence a chain depended: evidently the machinery of some rustic game peculiar to "these parts," for I never before or since have seen the like.

All was quiet and silent; no visitor appeared to avail himself of the proffered amusements. On entering the garden from the road, the only being to be seen was a grey-headed waiter, who was assiduously dusting one of the sheds or arbours; which, from being elevated above the level of the rest, and fitted with music-desks, I supposed to be intended for an orchestra.

Not wishing to disturb the economy of my cousins' home, and feeling both tired and thirsty,

I desired this amiable patriarch to bring me some tea; and during its infusion, I attempted a small conversation with him, hoping thereby to acquire some knowledge of the Twins, and their domestic arrangements.

My elderly friend needed no "drawing out;" he was candour itself; a man with a very flexible tongue, and a hater of secrets; so we were soon chattering away freely about Minster and its magnates.

In reply to my inquiry as to whether many people attended these gardens, he answered with a sigh—

"In the summer a many, ma'am; but the place is not what it was. Why, I can recollect the time, ma'am, when this here *parrylollygrim* was all boarded over and roped in for dancing, and some of the gentry here-a-ways got up a *hammatore orchestra*. I've lived here, man and boy, for up'ards of five-and-fifty years, and I do assure you, ma'am, I've seen these gardens crowded with rank and fashion; ladies dressed most elegant, as used to hang their cloaks on them pegs while they danced, and as many as ten gentlefolks' vehicles waiting at the

gate at once. Now times is changed ; we're quiet and respectable here, and don't want no riff-raff : and what with the railroads and steams, a set of imperent forrard young cockney chaps gets down to Margit and Ramsgit, and they don't think a gardin's a gardin without it's a minature Wauxall ; and we don't want no showers of rockets, or tight-rope dancing, or cord o volantes here. No, nothing so low ; so though we does have a good regular business one day with another, we don't have no fates or galers, or such like, to attract all the desolate characters in the country, not us. No, no ; slow and sure, slow and sure ; that's what we says : and we does pretty well, fust and last. Have a plate of shrimps, ma'am, or a sprinkle of creeses ? ”

Declining the proffered dainties, the conversation was continued by my inquiring whether there were many gentlefolks living in or near the village.

“ Pretty well for that, ma'am,” answered the old man, standing up instantly for the honour of his birthplace ; “ more than most neighbourhoods, I should say : leastways there's not so many lives in

the place itself as does round about. Not but what we has our residentiary gentlefolks, too. There's Squire Powell, Squire Farrer, Squire Crispe, and a few more the like o' them; and we've some highly respectable families lives in the village, too."

"Do you know anything of two ladies, by the name of Denne?" I inquired.

"Do I know the Miss Dennes?" exclaimed my venerable friend. "I should think I did indeed. Two little oldish ladies, disactly simular in appearances, living very retired down by the church. Why it isn't ten minutes afore you come as they passed this very garden gate, as they does pretty well every afternoon about this time; going home to their teas or what not, I take it."

"How shall I find their house?" I asked. "I know them well, and wish to see them."

"Lor, ma'am, you couldn't miss it if you tried; go straight down the street, and turn to the left when you get to the end: they lives in a brick house facing the church, with a hiron railing in front and a green door."

I thought this rather a vague direction, but as

he seemed to smile at the idea of there being any difficulty in the matter, I took heart, and ordering the fly to follow in an hour, strolled down the pretty rustic street, and very soon found the green door and railings he had described.

Sunset had just left its rich ruddy glow in the sky as I paused for a few moments before knocking; the air was redolent of flowers and hay; not a breath of wind ruffled the leaves of the magnificent trees, which sheltered the fine old church: there was that peculiar hush and hum, and trance-like stillness in air and on earth, which was to me something more sublime, more awful, more impressive than storm or lightning. From whence does this spring?—from what cause does it arise?—what hidden meaning ought it to convey? I have already noticed the same unearthly calm, as characterizing the hour of sunrise. And as I stood before my cousins' house, the heart-thrilling silence and stillness recalled to me so vividly my morning's ride from the ball at Freshfield, that on closing my eyes, a mind-painted panorama rose before me, and I seemed again to see the tall elms of our own old avenue, with the hares and

rabbits showing the brown tips of their ears above the feathery fern.

Sunrise and sunset—the beginning and the end of day, the analogue of life—why should this same lull, this pause, this calm catalepsy of Nature, always occur at the same period, as though life was suspended for a time, and Nature held her breath? The Easterns do well to dedicate those hours especially to prayer.

Thus I mused while pausing upon the door-step of the house at Minster.

At last the hush was broken; a distant laugh, a shout, an answering echo which told that the village evening school was “up;” a hoarse caw from the rookery, the rumble of a distant cart, the merry whistle of a passing labourer, and the mystic hour was over: Nature and busy life resumed their functions. So, nerving myself for the meeting, I raised the knocker, and not without some tremulousness about the knees, gave a modest tap. In a few moments the door was opened, and I had no difficulty in at once recognizing Phœbe Sackett in the neat maid-servant, who, in trim gray gown and snowy cap, stood waiting on the rug.



I had meant to mystify her, and had paved the way for a surprise by drawing my veil over my face; but one glance at her kind, honest, faithful face, unnerved me, and upset all my plans.

Poor Uncle Edward's last words, "Be kind to Phœbe: she has been a good girl to me," came back with startling force, and I could only ejaculate through my tears, "Phœbe dear, don't you know me?"

A moment's pause, a sudden change of expression, a start, a smothered cry, and Phœbe, forgetting all else in her great love and unchanging devotion to the race of Denne, was clasped in my arms, sobbing out her tearful delight upon my shoulder.

"Oh, Miss Sophie, my darling, my dear, is it—can it be you, come at last to see us? Oh, my own little Missy, that I never thought to see again! ah, my pretty pet, that I used to put to sleep with Donald of Dunblane." Phœbe meant nothing more improper than an old song, although her incoherent rapture made the sentence sound rather oddly. "And grown a grand lady, too!" What there could have been in my

appearance indicative of my being a "grand lady," I was at a loss to discover ; but there is a nameless something in the mode of dress adopted by denizens of large cities peculiarly imposing to the country mind ; and she was evidently impressed by my habiliments, which were by no manner of means awe-inspiring, and would certainly have elicited no particular mark of respect in London. Still, pursuing her reminiscences, Phœbe further remarked : " She, I recollect a chip of a child in black bombazine, as couldn't read, nor know much more than her prayers, and ' Let dogs delight,' bless her ! Oh, come in to the front parlour ; come in ! It will do my dear young ladies' hearts good to see your face again, my blessing."

I needed no second bidding, but followed Phœbe into what she called the " front parlour ;" where she left me, to go and find the Twins.

While she was gone, I took a comprehensive survey of the apartment : it was a long low-pitched room ; its little casement, looking towards the street, was filled with geraniums and heliotropes, which stood upon the low window-seat ; the walls were papered with a pattern of green leaves, on a

bluish grey ground; the floor was covered with a plain green baize; the furniture—with what a pang I recognised the delicate chintz which once formed the working day covering of poor Aunt Barbara's pavilion! I had no difficulty either in recognising the forms of tables, chairs, and sofa: there stood the devotional chair to which Angelica had clung, when she reminded me of Louise de la Vallière, on the day of Sir Brutus' proposal. There stood Miss Crabbeshawe's throne of state and judgment-seat; beside it the little carved stool on which I used to sit and dress my doll, Miss Marina, when we first went to Daundelyonn. That writing-table was my aunt's; that arm-chair had been Uncle Edward's first favourite, in his own particular "den."

I looked in vain for any relic of Eric's studio; none met my eye. At last there was a light pattering of feet in the passage, a chattering of shrill tongues, the door burst open, and I was in the arms of the Twins.

Really I had not done the little women justice, for I had not supposed them capable of so much real feeling as they evinced. They evidently

looked upon me as the last stray link of home.

For a time they were too much overpowered to be comprehensible; but at last their excitement toned down; and, placing me in the chair of state, Hilda perched on the devotional chair, and Elfrida on the stool at my feet; while Phœbe, apron at eyes, leaned over the high carved back of my throne, and an incoherent fire of questions, without time for answers, ensued, not one word of which do I remember.

"Dear cousin," at last said Hilda, "how nice of you to come and see us."

"Yes, dear Cousin Sophie," continued Elfrida; "so nice to come and take us by surprise."

"And so like my Missy to go and do such a thing, weren't it?" cried Phœbe, "coming pop in upon us poor humdrums like a blessed spirit, and taking away our very breaths. Merciful me, here am I a-rating and prating away like a chatter-pie as I am, and never asking of you to have no tea nor nothink."

I assured Phœbe, who was evidently the master mind in the house, that I had already indulged

in that refreshment, and that I could drink no more; but so pressing was she, aided by my cousins, that I was glad at last to compound for peace by promising to come over again to-morrow and dine early, and eat strawberries from their own garden.

This point settled, and present amnesty obtained, on the strength of my drinking a glass of home-made gooseberry wine, and eating a slice of seed-cake of Phoebe's own manufacture, we entered gradually into a more rational discourse; which, however, was decidedly more like a catechism than a conversation.

The fly had now been waiting more than an hour; a fact of which the unfortunate horse took care to keep me constantly reminded, by snorting violently in his nosebag, and continually shifting his feet, as his exhausted limbs endeavoured to obtain a trifle of ease by change of posture. The driver too, whom I could plainly see from the window, kept me in a state of disquiet; first rolling on one side and then to the other, with a drowsy indifference to the fate of his hat, and at each jerk of his head giving a violent twirl

to the drooping sprig of verbena pendent from his mouth, as though by way of preventing the recurrence of such sudden concussions.

Ultimately this process of snorting, bobbing, and twirling, became too much for my nerves : I was already irritable, very shortly I should have become savage ; so, with repeated promises to be at Minster to-morrow in good time for a two o'clock dinner, and bestowing a hug upon Phœbe which made her cry for mercy, I jumped into what she was pleased to call the "conveyance," and drove away through the dark shadowy lanes, amid the placid fields of arrow-like wheat or graceful oats, canary seed, and fragrant clover ; where, here and there lingered a benighted bee, still toiling on, in the laudable attempt to carry home more honied spoil than his strength would allow.

The sight of the Twins brought back to memory not so much the later years at Daundelyonn with their trials and troubles, as the earlier, brighter impressions of life's spring time. How well I remembered Miss Crabbeshawe's awful presence ; my grief at the loss of Emily Lovel ; my delight

at being admitted into the precincts of Aunt Barbara's own especial garden, there to watch her, assisted by Ben Jermin, grafting the standard rose-trees, while dull Billy held her garden basket, and kept up a running commentary on the proceedings. "Fust she nicks 'em, miss, and then she sticks 'em, miss; and she dooes 'em and undoes 'em, and cuts 'em up and cuts 'em down, and cuts 'em right and round about; and there 'aint a queen in Roosia, or Proossia, or little Britain, either as could beat her at the bushes, bless your pretty eyes: and let's be thankful for all things."

Leaning back in the "conveyance" with closed eyes, these and many other scenes passed in rapid succession through my mind; chequered visions of pleasure and pain which were suddenly dispelled by the driver bringing his vehicle to a sudden halt, and myself very nearly upon my face on the opposite seat.

"What on earth is the matter!" I exclaimed.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said the man, apologetically; "but I raily didn't know, as you was talking in your sleep. You was half a-laughing,

and half a-crying, and I was fearsome as you was a-going into a stericky fit. You's just home now, ma'am—beg pardon, I am sure for waking you," and I could see in the deep gloaming that he followed out the old habit of touching his hat.

Wake me? Well, well! there is a sleep for the mind as well as the body, and both may have their dreams. My waking visions for that night were over—thanks to my well-meaning coachman, and his fear of a "stericky fit."



## CHAPTER XLIV.

### DESOLATION.

“The jesters are gone, the play is over,  
The ghosts alone remain;  
A song and a sigh together hover  
Over the dreaming brain;  
To visions tender my soul I surrender,  
And sweet memorial pain.”

W. W. STORY.

Two o'clock found us once more assembled at the same dinner-table. Perhaps we all thought of the vacant places, for although we talked a great deal, we ate very little—which dereliction of duty Phœbe not only noticed, but felt it necessary to reprove.

“Really, young ladies, you have eaten little or nothing; and Miss Sophie not a bit better.”

I felt in honour bound to champion these elderly children; so objected that they could eat when I was gone, and were very wisely making the most

of their time as far as talking was concerned : that was my case ; I was reserving my appetite for my return to London, where I should have nothing better to do than to eat.

The wind-up to my defence softened Phœbe's ire, for she suddenly remembered that I always liked coffee immediately after dinner ; and I am sure she would have forgotten the fact had she been displeased. At last the time came for departure, and amid much tearful leave-taking, I started for Red-leaf ; whence, in company with its dear, kind mistress, on the following day I redeemed the promise given to Sir Brutus, by making a pilgrimage to the grave where he slept a dreamless sleep by *her* side who had been so dear to all of us. From thence, we proceeded to the church, where the men were still at work upon the tablet which Eric had ordered to be placed over his father and mother : they were adding a record to the memory of Edwy, son of the above Edward and Barbara Denne, who was drowned at sea. But one day out of the ten assigned to me now remained, and that one I determined should be dedicated to a solitary visit to Daundelyonn. Miss Crockett was most

anxious to accompany me; I had never known her so tenacious upon any subject: she urged reason after reason why it was in every way desirable that she should go; and I believe she was entirely prompted by solicitude on my behalf. Ingrate that I was, I obdurately threatened not to go at all unless permitted to go alone; for I felt the absolute necessity for having one day of sad and lonely retrospect—one day of self-anatomizing scrutiny, before I returned to busy life again, to London, to Ernest, and to Eric. “I cannot live without you!” How often these last words recurred to me! “I suppose you know that?” I had not known it: did I know it now? Oh, Eric, Eric, among all the sorrows and heart-break I had experienced, how the doubt which, in spite of all the assurances I could summon up to pacify my perturbed spirit, still lingered in the depths of my being—the doubt of *your* love, of *your* truth, of *your* lasting devotion—had been at once my spur and rein, my hope and constant torment.

The carriage was at the door which was to take me to Daundelyonn, and Jenny Wren, still unconvinced, was obstinately desirous to accompany

me: indeed, she had proceeded to extremities, and was in the act of tying on her bonnet, when I bethought me of an expedient to deter her. I would fire a *proverb* at her, and escape during the prostration of her system which I knew must ensue. "Dear Miss Crockett," I pleaded, "do not think me unkind, if I still beg you to let me go alone; your reasons are all excellent, but I am deaf to reason. You know the old adage, 'None are so deaf as those who *won't* hear.' " The blow struck home! With a wild look of astonishment she ceased tying her bonnet-strings; one exclamation of poignant dismay she uttered: what would have followed I know not, for availing myself of her *bouleversement*, I rushed downstairs, sprang into the carriage, and was gone. Desiring the driver to stop at that turn in the road where the first view of the lodge could be obtained, I descended, and ordering the man to return for me to the same spot at five o'clock, I made the rest of my pilgrimage on foot.

As I entered through the half-unhinged gate, some peacocks—why had they been left? the degenerate descendants of a once famous race—screamed and

galloped off hither and thither. Some fowls, too, betraying that peculiar acuteness to be found in all animals, man not excepted, who forage for themselves, ceased to ruffle their feathers in the dust, and uttered a warning note at the advent of a stranger. Cats of all colours, but with a general tendency to white, raced stealthily up and down among piles of half decayed firewood and heaps of accumulated rubbish. As I approached the house, I almost wished to be barked at by some infuriate dog: the sound would have been grateful, either as a welcome or a warning; but, no: the well-remembered kennel was empty, and I noticed a fly complacently crawling over a long forgotten bone in quest of some fragment of food. No merry voice of childhood, no admonitory tongue of mother, no cheerful whistle, no cleaving of billets, gave token of human life. Silence reigned so profoundly, that the beating of my own heart became distinctly audible. I wandered on towards the hall door; but on attempting to turn the handle, such an anarchy of emotion swept over me, as I thought of all those who had passed and repassed in joy and sorrow, life and death, through

that much-loved portal—alas! to do so no more—that my hand refused its office, and I turned away. Bending my steps towards the servants' entrance, and passing by the narrow path leading to the poor old donjon, now completely choked with tall thistles and briars, I tried the door; it was unlocked: a feeling that this was very careless, if not disrespectful of somebody, thus to neglect the house, suddenly possessed me; why, I know not, for there was nought to steal.

The kitchen windows, once so clean and bright, were now powdered with dust and filled with spiders' webs; the air, once redolent of that peculiar odour of charcoal and strawberries which marked the return of "preserving time," and which invariably brought us children to the spot—under pretence of borrowing a knife or bit of string, but in reality to dip a stray spoon into the tempting cauldron—was now heavy with the smell of fungus, damp, and mildew.

Oval white patches on the walls marked the spot where once the bright array of dishes and covers had shone forth. The grate was rusty, but the *débris* of the last fire, consisting of an arched

lump of half burnt coal, yet remained, the wretched remnants of a blazing hearth.

While sorrowing over these vestiges of bygone days, the constant tiny sound of dripping water from the pump gave (as I fancied, and, being alone, perhaps faintly dreaded) a dull chilling assurance that some one must be in the house; but on inspection the handle was thickly coated with dust. Yet during the long hours of the night, and all through the desolate days, did this tiny drip, drip, drip, untiringly continue! Why did it not cease to flow, like the current of life around it? Every room, passage, and closet was redolent of the same damp and mildewy smell; the tapestry had been stripped from the dining-room walls, and in place of the glories of the Queen of Sheba, a dirty, tattered expanse of coarse canvas obtruded itself upon the eye, wobegone as the fortunes of the house it clung to. The poor old Bower-chamber (what would Daundelyonn have been without it?) once so primly neat and clean, its ample fire-place and deep receding hobs, whereon many a stolen apple had been hurriedly roasted, were now filled with paper, sticks, and broken glass.

Straws lay scattered scantily here and there, mute evidences of the last packing-up. One memorial yet remained untouched: some ill-defined initials scrawled on the window pane; the desire to possess these mementos of idle moments past was strong within me, but to remove them was impossible.

The next spot to be visited was Eric's studio. On opening the door I almost cried aloud, so startling was the darkness within, so deathlike the still, stuffy atmosphere which greeted me. By some accident the hand which had opened the shutters of the other rooms to admit air and light, had forgotten this one, and left it to the dominion of gloom and obscurity; so let it be—fitter emblem, truer type and symbol of its own fate, and ours. One glance, in passing, at the bedrooms, where I had so often watched beside poor Angelica's feverish and lesson-haunted slumbers, where we had tended Florence in the wild effervescence of her crushed and apparently hopeless affection for Louis Grey; and then, nerving myself to the task, I descended into the never-to-be-forgotten conservatory. Alas! alas! mournful and deserted as was the rest of the



house, I was scarcely prepared for the havoc with which the hand of desolation had swept over this once bright and beautiful spot. Never either before or since has such a picture of the ravages which neglect can inflict been presented to my view. Shattered glass, broken pillars, trailing boughs, mildewed stones, dead flowers, and withered leaves—it was some time before my swimming eyes could realize this picture of ruin and decay.

Here the frail stem of what had once been a delicate exotic was bent and hidden beneath a cluster of poisonous fungi; there a luxuriant growth of ugly weeds had overgrown the once spotless marble pavement; and that which rendered the whole spectacle yet more sad and sickly, more appalling to the heart of her who beheld it, was the over-teeming of both animal and vegetable life, which was only too hideously apparent. Clusters of huge snails clung to the mouldy door-posts; large orange-tawny slugs curled and twisted beneath the tiger-spotted leaves; monstrous insects, forced into unusual growth by the unwholesome damp and heat, crawled and whirled and flitted in every direction: frogs, toads, bats, spiders,

feathery moths, and burnished beetles, met the eye on every side. The choked and neglected fountain had long since ceased to play; and as I bent over the cracked and mossy brim, half-thinking once more to see reflected in its still waters the pale face and dark lustrous eyes of former times, a mass of discoloured leaves which filled its basin was all that met my view; from which emerged a twining, wriggling viper, who with erect emerald crest, and forked, darting, quivering tongue, blinked at the stranger with the "snake's small eye," shy and dull, as the poet has depicted it.

I could bear no more. Fatigued as much by mental conflict as bodily exertion, I hastened again into the fresh air, and bent my steps towards the gardener's cottage; whither, as was announced by the light curl of scanty blue smoke from the chimney, the last ray of warmth and comfort had betaken itself for refuge, until some rude hand should finally extinguish it.

A small wood fire burnt upon the hearth, so small indeed that I could hardly comprehend how it kept alight; a stout bacon rack, supporting the

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minutest modicum of a flitch, depended from the low pitched ceiling; a small but exceedingly loud ticking clock hung from the wall; a bed covered with a clean but much tattered patch-work quilt, occupied one corner of the little room; and an insignificant round table—whereon were placed the remnants of a frugal meal, consisting of a thick crusted fruit pudding, with a tiny brown basin containing some coarse treacly sugar, and a mug with a little weak-looking beer—occupied the centre of the apartment, flanked by two common willow chairs.

Here at last were evidences of human life: but who was the occupant of this solitary outpost? Who was bold enough to play sentinel over nothing, amid so much desolation?

While indulging in these speculations, the dull, uncertain tread of age became audible. I instantly stepped forward to claim companionship, perhaps friendship, with the Recluse who had dared to brave this Palmyran solitude; to my joy I at once recognised old Ben Jermin.

“Why, Jermin, dear old Jermin, is it you?”  
I said.

The old man stared. "Ay, who be you? Missus, who be you looking for? No one ain't here but me, and my boy: the house be shut up."

"I came to see the dear old place: and find out whether anyone I knew was left behind."

"Oh, yes, the place be to let; leastways so I hear, though no one ain't been after it."

"I don't come to take the place, Jermin, I only came to look at it once more."

"Everything is took away, as *could* be took away leastways."

"Don't you know me, Jermin? I'm Miss Denne. Don't you remember how you and I used to feed the poultry and peacocks?"

"There aint no haycocks here now; there ain't been a scythe put to the grass, front nor back, these two years."

"Not haycocks, Jermin, peacocks," I replied; "peacocks."

"Ah! them peacocks ain't much account. There was too old 'uns left, and these is their young 'uns; they aint no good: we used to have some prime 'uns, time gone bye."

From the incoherency of his replies, it was

evident that the poor old fellow was now deafer than ever ; and his infirmity gave him an air of cold obstructiveness, almost more painful than the contemplation of the waste I had so recently traversed.

Again, in a louder tone, I endeavoured to bring myself to his recollection. Could I be so strangely altered, that every lineament of my former self had vanished ?

“ Don’t you remember me, Sophie Denne ? ”  
I enquired.

“ Oh, yes, the Dennes be all goné : Mr. Denne the Squire be dead long ago ; and the one as Dandelion belongs to is foreign, somewhere ; and nobody can’t do nothing with the place till he come back, and so it’s gone to this here rack and ruin.”

“ I am one of the Dennes, Jermin.”

“ Yes, my name be Jermin ; I looks after what I can for the old Squire’s sake as is gone : there warn’t nobody to battle the watch for them as was left, so I stopt here.”

My heart was sorely wrung. Here was an old retainer fast decaying like all around him, the last

link in a long sad chain of melancholy events ; and from him no response, no partnership in memories so touching, could be elicited.

It occurred to me that perhaps by writing on a slip of paper the fact of who I was, I might give him a clue to the object of my visit ; for there was an air of reserve and distrust mingled with his replies, which plainly showed that he thought I was "after no good," and that he had better be upon his guard. Motioning him to re-enter the lodge, I drew an envelope from my pocket, and showed him the superscription, "Miss Sophie Denne."

The old man took the paper with an enquiring look, remarking that there warn't no good leaving letters ; no one wouldn't call for them : the postmen hadn't called any time these two years, and better, "'cept for me, leastways," he added.

"Read," shouted I ; "read that."

He again looked at the envelope ; but he could read nothing without glasses, for which he fumbled with very horny hands in the pockets of a coarse corduroy jacket. After much search he succeeded in finding them in the drawer of

the table ; they were a pair of my Uncle's, made of tortoiseshell : how well I remembered seeing them on his dear old face many—many times.

After staring steadfastly at the paper, and then at myself, for some moments, the truth seemed to dawn upon him.

“ Be *you* a Denne ? ”

Again I pointed to the paper, and again he set to work to make out the puzzling letters. At last my object was gained.

“ Sure, well—sure, yes—Lord who ever—why it be Miss Sophie ! But 'you're so altered, blest if I know'd you : every thing's altered, Miss, ain't it though, sadly altered ? Lor ! I *am* glad to see you ! I thought perhaps if I stopped, some of you might come back to Dandelion ; the young ladies may be, or chance Mr. Harold, so I held on. Sit ye down, Miss, sit ye down.”

I complied, making him do the same. Poor old fellow, what a rallying point he was in the tide of life's battle. Well, his heart was large, if his body was feeble.

“ You see,” he continued, “ first one trouble come, and then another, thick as rain ; didn't they,

Miss? and there was no standing agin it. I a'most forgets what did happen: I a'most forgets my own name sometimes, there's been so much moiling and toiling. Rot them hops! they was at the bottom of it all. The Squire, he believed everyone was honest like himself, and when he found as there was no honesty nowhere, it broke him up, and Missus dying too. She worn't no account to him in a business way; but, Miss Sophie, they was a-mated many years, and then one died, and then another went ——"

This melancholy *résumé* might have continued for an indefinite time, had I not interrupted him by enquiring after his son, "dull Billy."

"Oh, he be about somewhere, he don't travel far; he ain't 'all there,' as you know, Miss Sophie: his head be ailing, but he fancies things will come right again too."

"No, Jermin, no; the nestlings are scattered, and the nest is cold: the well-remembered call can never collect us together again in this world; some are laid low in the grave, the hearts of others are estranged. Like the birds in the fields, the old ones have been killed, and



the young ones dispersed, to seek their own living, and escape the toils set for them, as best they may. I am the last stray bird which has returned, and I find the nest empty.

"Not quite empty, Miss Sophie," said the old man, greatly to my astonishment, for I had spoken more to myself than to him; but the warmth of his feelings had suddenly rendered his hearing more acute.

"No, Jermin; not all gone while *you* are here!"

At this moment dull Billy made his appearance, certainly looking older, but with the same kind, silly, vacant expression, as of yore.

He did not know me, but old Jermin gave him the cue by saying, "Billy, here be Miss Sophie come to see us."

Billy gazed memory-stricken at me and said, in a painfully listless voice, "Be she? but be she come to stop?" adding oracularly, "I know'd they'd come back one while, father."

"No, Billy, I'm not come to stop *now*. I've only come to see how you are getting on."

"Be you a coming to Dandelion soon? Father

and I'll soon set the place to rights. Be all the folks a comin' back, missy?"

"No, Billy, not now; perhaps never."

"Never, missy! Oh, Lord! never be a long time, and no end to it: Billy don't like never."

Old Jermin here interrupted him, by asking where Mr. Harold was.

"We have never heard from him since he left, Jermin."

"Ah!" added the old man, "he were too fond of Miss Angelica, and I always thought as she was of he; leastways till she married *him* at Freshfield, and then I worn't sure on it: he was always very queer, but a deal queerer after that was settled. And Mr. Eric, miss. People did say as there was something between you and him, and I partly took to it myself; *but* somehow we was wrong: and we ain't generally wrong neither; we sees clearer out o' doors than the folks does who are in sometimes. And Mr. Edwy, he died too, miss! Ah, that was terriblest of all that were: I remember what Phœbe said about your a seeing of him come home wet through, and looking in at winder. And the young ladies, they

be pretty comfortable I hear" (he meant the Twins, of course); "Phœbe writes to me now and again. And Miss Florence as was, how be she, Miss?"

At last he gave me an opportunity to reply: "Yes, Jermin, she is very well; but she has a large family, and is not very rich."

"Ah! miss, *she* wasn't made to moil and toil; but, 'as we makes our beds, so we must lie in 'em."

Poor Jermin! how lucky Miss Crockett did not hear his adage! The day was now declining, the hour at which I had appointed to leave was long past, the

"Shades of night were falling fast,"

and it was time that I tore myself away from Daundelyonn. If I lingered, it would be the first time in my life on which, as the dews of evening fell, I should look upon that house without seeing the cheerful lights in the windows and the forms of the inmates flitting to and fro: better to go now. My thoughts wandered towards the churchyard at St. Agatha's, where all that was earthly of the master and mistress reposed beneath the same dull chilly mist which was rising here. No need of lights in either place now! I determined to evade

the anguish of feeling, as though in darkness, and unknown, I was thrust from the door an exile. I would quit the loved old spot at once.

The wind, too, now began to moan, as if in token of a coming storm: perhaps it was but a parting dirge or requiem for those I thought of.

My visit had evidently greatly gratified poor Jermin, who practised all sorts of artifices to make me stay: he volunteered to make some tea, to broil me a rasher; and he supposed I wouldn't drink some of his beer.

At length his artifices and my own excuses to myself were exhausted, and I rose to go—never so reluctantly: I felt that I was standing in a little room talking to that old friend, gazing into the small fire, and summoning old memories on the old—old spot for the last time.

“Well, missy, then you be a-going, indeed; when shall you be this way agin? I'll lay, afore you comes back, you'll have to find me not far off the Squire; Ben Jermin be deaf a bit now, but he'll be deafer then. Well, missy, I done as I know'd right, and if so be as I goes, give an eye to Billy: I'd do more than that for any o'

you, Miss Sophie. Where be going to live? as I may write, or get some'un to write, if the worst as can come, comes."

"Never fear, Jermin; while any of us live, neither you nor Billy shall want for food and lodging, and kind words into the bargain."

"I knows that, missy, God bless you!—I'm sure of that."

I wrung his hand and promised to see him again some day—speedily, I hoped; never, I feared.

Once more I passed down the avenue; the wind moaned sadly through the branches of the trees, sending down small bits of their withered ends upon our heads, while tiny eddies of fallen leaves swept about our feet. At last we reached those noble but deeply rusted gates—and here was to be the final parting. Despite my promise to return, the heart gave no response; but the echo of a sad foreboding faintly uttered poor Sir Brutus' words, "No, never again, never again!" I wrung his hand: "Good-bye! dear old Jermin."

"Bless you, missy; bless you! Oh, if you would but come back and light up the old place once more! See how drear it looks. How it would

please the old Squire if he but seed it. Perhaps he could, missy, who knows?—perhaps he knows as you've been here *now* to see us; to look after them as served him duly and truly—as loved him like one of his own. It warn't no fault of his'n as it has come to this."

"Listen, Jermin, it has begun to rain," said I, as two or three large drops fell with a dull pattering sound.

"So it be, missy; but I'm right glad to think that the day was bright and the birds was singing when *he* left: not like it is now; and the weeds hadn't got to such a head: they gets beyond me and Billy. Sometimes I thinks we're little better than weeds ourselves; but they were different when he went away, with a smile upon his face and a kind word on his lips. 'All's for the best, Jermin; all's for the best,' he says, and then the gates shut. No gates won't shut where he's gone to: gates is never shut *there*. Ah! dear me, I often thinks I sees him on Sir Toby, and Jem Yeo at his heels, a riding up this here avenue, and Miss Florence and the parson, and Miss Angelica and the Baronite. Ah! well,

fancy plays us sad tricks sometimes ; but ‘ all’s for the best : ’ I shall never forget them words ; and when I looks and sees everything rotting away so fast I says to myself, ‘ Never mind, my man ; all’s for the best. ’ ”

“ Yes, Jermin, all *is* for the best : there is One above who orders all things : not a sparrow falls but He knows it, and cares for it. He cares too for us. ”

“ Yes, missy, yes ; God save us and send them as is left of you back again to Dandelion ! and if not—well, well, well !—we’ll do our duty all the same. Won’t we, Billy ?—it’s all for the best. Good-bye, and God bless you, Miss Sophie. ”

“ Good-bye Jermin—good-bye Billy—good-bye, good-bye ! ” And with this final farewell, the heavy iron gates of Daundelyonn closed for ever upon the last of the Dennes.

## CHAPTER XLV.

## CONFESSIONS.

"But did I say I loved him not? O God!  
 If I said that, I say since truth was truth  
 There never was a falsehood half so false.  
 I say I love him; and I say beside  
 That but to say I love him is as nothing;  
 'Tis but a tithe and scantling of the truth!"

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

To those persons who have had sufficient temerity  
 or determination to carry them thus far into the  
 annals of the house of Daundelyonn, it will  
 seem strange that amid so many records of the  
 lives of others, I should have hitherto said so little,  
 as far as relates to *myself*, upon the subject which  
 generally assumes the principal place in most  
 books; and which is frequently, and it is to be  
 feared, too justly, considered as the be-all and  
 end-all of woman's existence.

Who can doubt that I here allude to Love? that



concentration of strength, weakness, hope, fear, and vanity; that chaotic fusion of conflicting emotions which blends into one inseparable mass all that is sublime and contemptible, great and feeble, real and delusive, in the burning volcano of a woman's heart. Verily, no history of woman's career can be complete without such a record: the world without the sun, the night without stars, storms without lightning, would be no less impossible or incomplete. Wherefore, then, have I been hitherto so nearly silent upon this theme? It is not that I have lived unvisited by such vernal fancies, such summer day-dreams, such autumn reveries, such touching inevitable influences, or such painful wintry memories.

Many a time and oft as this story of our lives unrolled itself, have the desire and the strong disinclination to disclose them more fully, done fierce battle. The conflict has been desperate, and the prostration painful; but ever as I recovered from the shock, has repugnance sealed my lips and paralysed my pen; albeit that ever and anon the edges of the deep mental veil have been illumined by the brighter thoughts beneath, which,

while struggling to escape, have only tended to render the succeeding darkness more intense and more profound.

Years—long and weary years—had passed away into the obscurity of time since first that fatal fever thrilled and scorched my soul; yet the hot blood mounted to my cheek and brow when I unrolled the record, and with the aid of its faded writing recalled the visions of my youth. Yet a faint chilly sickness fell upon my heart, when retracing all that I had felt, endured, and suffered. Coward, fool, imbecile, that I was, I trembled to lift the pall which had so long hidden my heart's history! I dreaded to evoke the spirits of the past from their dark recesses, to summon up the dreary phantasmagoria of memory, and represent them to my unwilling gaze.

Time had in part tranquillized a spirit once violent and impassioned. Good and wise ones would say that with many cares and abundant employment I ought to have been happy. But does time, however well spent, always bring peace of mind?

O ye good and wise ones! ye salt of the

earth! we ought to be happy, say you? But are we so?

From morning until night I was then unceasingly employed, in one long round of useful, excellent, laborious, but most disagreeable occupations. Yet amid all the uncongenial, bustling, distracting business of everyday life, there never was a day so long or a night so weary, but that I found ample time to think in. Many a day when from morn till night I had found abundant employment in answering dull commonplace notes of congratulation to some, of condolence to others, in paying bills, sorting dusty papers, and copying violoncello music, not one note of which did I understand: besides sitting with old Mrs. Crump while suffering under an attack of chronic face-ache, in a room smelling about equally of mutton broth and camomile flowers, with a slight admixture of creosote, wearied by the *sotto-voce* buzzing of a secret society of blue-bottles, holding a very truculent meeting in the window recess.

When I had with much trouble and consideration endeavoured to accommodate the tastes of two

capricious appetites while ordering dinner—that most difficult of all the practical sciences; when I had read aloud long dreary debates without “taking in” one word of their sense, supposing them to possess any; had sung and played to order all the evening, while suffering under the leaden influence of a violent headache; and this, too, in a style of music positively repulsive to me: in fact, when I had been exceedingly busy all day, and well knew that I should be so to-morrow, did I not, nevertheless, find abundant time for thought?

The weariness consequent upon the fulfilment of these duties did not bring repose: I was fatigued but not sleepy, exhausted but not contented. Oh! mockery it is to say that employment conquers thought! In proportion as the body becomes overpowered, so does the mind become more ungovernably active; fancies that possibly might have been repressed and choked down in the vigour of the morning, set at defiance the jaded powers of the evening. In the silence and solitude of my own dim room, closeted with all my old hopes and fears, my old joys and sor-

rows, my old loves and antipathies, was I the less a coward? Was I the better able to contend against the emotions of memory by reason of the past activity of the day?

\* \* \* \*

It is midnight—in the middle of an unusually lovely summer; through the open window the cool fresh air, scented with the night perfume of flowers and a faint odour of burnt wood, comes stealing in. Within the house all is sleep and silence; the world is hushed, the heavens themselves are in repose: all is rest and peace save the ever restless glittering stars. If I must complete the chronicle by telling the story of a woman's love, let it be here, and now: no fitter time, no fitter place for the activity of memory to exhaust itself."

And how shall it be written? How clothe the thoughts, how shape them to the common capacity of my sisterhood?

The cold conventional language of the world is not worthy of these memories; I would deck them with flowers from the garden of romance, but that I will not have them scoffed at.

Well, to the task. As they flow so let them find a local habitation and a name on paper. That my love had been unhappy I need scarcely say. There is little to describe in the even tenor of a prosperous passion: tears and acquiescence may be disposed of in a line; there would be nothing in such circumstances to induce the most sensitive woman to shrink from the avowal. True it is, that I was not formed of that "precious porcelain of human clay that breaks with the first fall." True it is, that I recovered from the first wild spasm of grief which convulsed my heart and agonized my brain, when I believed that hope was over and happiness a dream. But there were moments when my very soul throbbed beneath the load of sorrowful recollections, and still more sadly writhed under the torturing conviction that,

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow  
Was remembering happier things."

The feeble glimmer of flirtation, the lambent flame of a tranquil and protracted courtship, were phases in Love's transit by which I was never visited. My heart was led on slowly, firmly, and

all unconsciously by a stronger mind and more dominant will than ever stoops to such ignoble allurements.

Where feebler beings would have passed happily through the prescribed ordeal of tepid love, or milder matrimony, finding no obstacle in their path; or, if found would meekly have succumbed to it; I, urged forward by the force of a superior will, found many stony spots interspersed not unfrequently with pleasant places. How pleasant they were! Oases in the waste of life, making up for much of misery.

Rough was the journey, turbulent at times the companionship; but, oh! how fascinating! And then the disseverment! a thunder-clap in summer; sudden inanition after plenitude of mental action; instant isolation after full community of mind?

Love, that one small monosyllable, had hardly been so much as mentioned between Eric and myself, as related to *ourselves*; but all that formed its essence had been deeply instilled drop by drop into my heart's inmost cells, imbued into my very being, infused into the arcana of my soul.

He knew and exulted in his power ; I gloried in the bondage, and proudly wore the chain.

One person in a thousand may perhaps understand or appreciate feelings such as these : some doubtless would deem them rhapsodies ; others, puerilities. There are some few, however, who will both understand, and perhaps recognise in their own hearts the mental malady beneath which I had so deeply suffered. To *these* kindred spirits it is that I disclose the memory of my wild delirium ; that I tell of that constant yearning of the heart for the utterance of one short sentence, ever acted, never spoken, whence the future was to open bright and glorious and the past be but a happy memory. To *these* it is that I tell of the lurid glare of the volcano beside which the feeble glimmer of the world's dim love fades like a taper in the blaze of day.

But as for their *opposites* : “ Disons-le ces braves gens qui restent en dehors de ces passions là—ces bons bourgeois dont on se moque trop,—ce qui du reste leur est bien égal : qui naissent, vivent, et meurent dans l'acajou ; qui ne tentent rien en dehors du cercle où le sort les a placés ; qui se



marient le Samedi, font une noce, chantent des chansons au dessert, aiment leur femme à une température tiède, au *bain-marie*, pour ainsi dire : trouvent les passions invraisemblables, parce-qu'elles sont d'un étage ou deux au dessus du rez-de-chaussée de leurs sensations calmes ; meurent d'apoplexie à soixante ans ; et dorment aucimetière sous une inscription de mauvais goût : disons-le ces gens là sont les heureux de la terre, et il n'est pas un de nous qui en degradingolant d'un de ses rêves les plus chers, ne donnerait la poésie de son imagination pour la béate figure d'une de ces admirables nullités."

For me, I have been struggling all day, more than is usually my wont, against a host of sad thoughts and sorrowful reflections.

It is my birthday ; a fact of which I have been careful not to remind any one, indeed I have tried to forget it myself, but cannot : the recurrence of this "footprint on the sand of time" startles my spirit, and raises such melancholy memories that they defy control, and in spite of my utmost efforts to repress them, they will find utterance.

I am conscious that in thus yielding to an irresistible impulse I have sadly neglected Eric's advice, "never to waste my time or try my temper by allowing my mind to dwell upon what *might* have been ;" but my thoughts would not be denied expression, and upon this my birthday and my last visit to the home of my childhood, they claimed a privilege which I could not refuse them.

" Oh ! wherefore should I pause to think  
On many a vanished scene,  
On what I was, on what I am,  
Or what I might have been?  
The years that I have wasted rise  
In swift succession to my eyes.

" Solemn and sad their spectral forms  
Float by on memory's tide;  
Love wasted, friendship ill bestowed,  
And talents misapplied—  
The warm wild depths of feeling o'er  
Which can be mine on earth no more.

" No ! never more for me on earth  
The affluence of heart,  
The ready smile of thoughtless glee,  
The tear so prone to start.  
Alas for me! the icy pall  
Of cold indifference covers all.

274. THE DENNES OF DAUNDELYONN.

"Would I might even feel the grief  
I felt in days of old,  
'Twere better to be sorrowful  
Than be so calm and cold;  
It is too late, my lot is cast:  
Then wherefore think upon the past.

"The past! my world—my universe;  
O love of other days!  
The present pales before the light  
Of thy resplendent rays.  
I'd forfeit years to feel once more  
One hour of happiness that's o'er.

"Where are the friends who gathered round  
My childhood's sunny dawn?  
And childhood's hopes, and childhood's fears?  
Alas! they all are gone!  
I feel no love, no hate, no care,  
No hope, no pleasure, no despair.

"And yet I wear the brightest smile  
Amid the thoughtless throng;  
My heart is silent, but at times  
It *will* be heard in song.  
I break the spell, I rend the chain,  
And turn me to the world again."

The fallen fortunes of our race had separated  
Eric and myself; torn us asunder prematurely,  
mercilessly: seldom had we met again in later  
years, and then only under the chilling, blighting  
thought of what perchance *might* have been our

lot under happier auspices. This feeling, fraught as it ever was with a sense of subtle pain rather than true pleasure, would have induced me to seize with eagerness upon any pretext, however trivial, to shun an interview; but that a sense of duty and the memory of "auld lang syne," qualified the cup of sorrow, and bade me drink it to the dregs.

Not one among the circle which surrounded us in those happy bygone days at Daundelyonn ever dreamed of what I then felt. Perhaps they were too fully occupied with their own joys and sorrows; or perhaps my nature was too undemonstrative to afford a clue to the fiery chamber within my heart: unheeded and unaided, what I endured was borne in sorrow and in secret. And now Eric had returned once more, as a friend, as a brother; all other thoughts, hopes, and feelings must now be over, must be quelled: ay, crushed. And yet, like a diamond in a well, deep down in the recesses of my being, rested the unaltered love of my youth, unchanged, unchangeable; ready to spring forth again and shine with yet purer lustre in the brightness of that realm wherein "there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

CHAPTER XLVI.

LAST SCENE OF ALL.

"Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history."  
*As you like it.*

ERIC's injunction to return within ten days had been complied with, consequently smiles greeted my arrival in town.

"Here you are once more, Soph, to gladden our eyes," said my cousin, approvingly, as he rushed out to open the cab door.

"Yes, here I am," was the response; "how could I do less than be punctual when I remembered that you said you could not live without me? I dare say you might have survived one day's delay; still the Thames is horribly near at hand, and it was as well to be on the safe side;" this was said in a joking tone, for I was

not unwilling occasionally to retaliate upon him his many teasings.

"You are in the humour to be pleasant," retorted Eric, in a rather peevish and slightly discontented voice; "it appears that with you many a true word spoken in earnest may be taken in jest. However, this is no place for a display of wit, so let us go in."

"Jest or no jest, here I am to my time," said I, as we entered the dining-room; "but where is Ernest?"

"Oh, he is out somewhere, as usual; but tell me how have you been, Soph?—how are the girls?—how did you get on down in the poor old place?"

"As well as could be expected, Eric, considering that every person and object I met awakened nothing but sorrowful recollections: death and desolation on all sides. What a wreck is Daundelyonn! it is indeed sad to see. Can nothing be done to save it from utter destruction? Old Ben Jermin and dull Billy are the only ones left: they inquired after you, among the rest. Poor fellows! I promised them that they should never be forgotten."

"Nor shall they, Soph. Did you go up to the donjon?"

"No; I had not the heart."

"The studio, did you go in there, Soph?"

"I just put my head in for a moment, but I don't think the shutters had ever been opened since your poor father left the house; and the close damp smell, the silence, and endless recollections prevented my going further than the door."

"Poor old studio! Ah, Soph! we had many happy meetings there, had we not? And the bower-chamber, you saw that?"

Oh! yes; there was plenty of light there: but the glass in the windows was broken. And the conservatory, oh! Eric, that was in worse plight than all the rest: the very recollection of it makes me shudder."

"We passed some pleasant hours in all these places, Soph," said Eric, sadly, after a pause. "Do you remember the evening we spent in the conservatory, when I was supposed to have sprained my ankle so badly?"

"Of course I do, Eric," I replied, carelessly;

but while saying so, my heart gave a bound, which almost made my words inarticulate.

"Do you remember any particular incident of that evening, Soph?" he added, drawing nearer towards me, and assuming a peculiar tone of voice, which told me instantly, although I did not see his face, that it had once more resumed the old mysterious expression.

"A particular incident, Eric?" this I repeated somewhat nervously, for I more than half suspected to what occurrence he alluded.

"Shall I remind you, Soph?"

"If you like," was my reply; and the idea suddenly crossed my mind that he might possibly refer to something I had forgotten.

"Well, then, do you remember my doing anything of *this* sort?" And passing his arm round my waist, he imprinted a kiss upon my lips, so like in touch and tenderness to that one given of old, that I might well have fancied myself back again in the old school-room. "Soph, let me finish now what I began then," he murmured, hurriedly—"what I began then, but saw no prospect of accomplishing: let me win you



to be my wife. Be my wife, my own! Will you, Soph?—say Yes or No.” A loud ring at the door-bell at this moment announced Ernest’s return. “There is your brother,” said Eric, nervously. “No more now; you will have time to think before we meet again.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Dinner’s on the table, miss,” said the well-known voice of Davis at my door. Thus aroused from a long reverie into which I had fallen, I was on the point of replying with the usual “very well,” when, raising myself from the chair, I discovered that I was sitting just as I had thrown myself down. My bonnet still on, not a string untied, nor a glove removed.

“Say that I am too tired, Davis, and cannot go down to dinner. I will join them in the evening: send Annie to me.”

On the arrival of my maid, I was about to blame her for neglect, when, in extenuation, she pleaded having knocked several times; but gaining no answer and finding the door locked, she thought that I slept, and did not like to wake me after a fatiguing journey.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Be my wife, Soph!" Why this request *now*, so late? "Be my wife;" and then had resounded the violent ring at the door-bell. I had given no response to this entreaty, I was certain. All the scenes I had so lately visited; the bower-chamber, the conservatory, the donjon passed before me. And then again recurred the words like a trumpet within my soul, "Be my wife." Oh, Eric, why did you not ask me that question in times gone by? There would have been no hesitation in the response *then*. But now—and memory unbidden whispered those words of Wallenstein—

"How? Then, when all  
Lay in the far off distance, when the road  
Stretched out before thine eyes interminably,  
Then hadst thou courage and resolve; and now,  
Now that the dream is being realized,  
The purpose rife, the issue ascertained,  
Dost thou begin to play the dastard now?"

Then Florence crossed the scene, with her endless family and host of troubles; then Angelica, in the calm, still sleep of death; then Miss Crockett, with her voice of warning; and then came thoughts as to my own possible fate. Had Eric really loved me during all these years? If so,

why thus tardy in confessing it? Did he doubt me?—did he doubt himself? Was it pique that had prompted this laggard declaration?—or was it that he had seen no hope of maintaining a wife until now? Surely the latter had been the case; and this thought was an inexpressible relief.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Soph, it is getting late, are you ill? Won’t you come down to us to-night?” tenderly inquired the voice of Eric, at my door.

“No, not ill, Eric, only very tired: I shall not go down to-night. Will you send me some tea?”

“Let me in for a moment,” he whispered.

“Not to-night; to-morrow, Eric.”

“Well, dear child, do as you like: I dare say you are very tired and excited; I’ll send the tea. God bless you, and good night; we shall meet in the morning.”

In the morning—yes; and how shall I meet him then?—how reply to “Sophie, be my wife?” How short the time to decide the destiny of a life; and this without a friend in the world to take counsel with. What have I uttered—heedless words—wicked words, were they not so heed-

less. Human counsel may be unavailable ; friends after the fashion of this fleeting world may be far away ; but beyond all worlds there is one Great Counsellor to whom none ever yet appealed in vain : the friend of the friendless, the father of the fatherless. Put out the light, Sophie Denne—put out the light—lie down on your pillow calmly, peaceably, as when you were a little child, then humbly and most faithfully appeal to Him for aid and consolation ; if that appeal be made in the true spirit of a little child, fear not for the result in the morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the breakfast-table Eric was pale as death, Ernie silent, and I intensely nervous ; I don't think we even wished each other good-morning : something told me that Ernest knew what had happened, and this tended to make me feel still more isolated. The misfortunes of Daundelyonn, however, for once proved a grateful theme of conversation, and to this subject we clung with wonderful tenacity ; Ben Jermin and his son were at once to be provided for, and all sorts of things done without delay.

Breakfast over, I arose for the purpose of making the customary household arrangements. These completed, and I would not spare myself one of them, with tottering knees I ascended the stairs and went direct to the studio, although I felt certain Eric was there. I entered—yes, there sat my cousin before an empty easel. Instantly, so quickly indeed that I had not time to seat myself, he arose, and seizing me by both shoulders, gazed intently into my eyes, as though he would therein read my very soul, muttering at the same time spasmodically—

“Soph, dear Soph, now let me know my fate.”

“Dear Eric, let me be seated; give me a moment’s pause.”

“Sophie, I did not mean to pounce upon you as I have done. I scarce know what I am about: I have lost my usual self-control. The one great hope and blessing of my life is now either to be lost or won. Sophie, will you speak to me?”

“Eric, I am sure you wish me to be frank with you; you always have said that I am truth itself.”

"So I have," he replied, with a strange uncertainty of voice, "and so you are, Soph."

"Then, Eric, tell me why you have so long delayed making an avowal of your love for me? Why have you so constantly acted and said everything but that you loved me? Did you think me more or less than woman? Did you think me incapable of affection? You cannot have thought so. Then I ask again, why this delay?—why these long—long years of vacillation and suspense?"

"Sophie, my child, I have never vacillated; never swerved a needle's point: the hope of marrying you has ever been my guiding star. Think what I had to contend against! You well know what my father's opinions were as to the marriage of cousins; and on what was I to have maintained you? Had he even given his consent, which was impossible, how could we have existed? Want of fortune has constantly restrained me from making the avowal I have now made; yet the hope of one day being able to offer you something better than beggary has prompted me to retain the hold I felt that I had upon your

affections. The day has come at last : I have something beyond even mere competence to offer ; the future is bright and promising. It is true that I never did actually propose, because I would not entangle you in the meshes of a lingering, perhaps endless, engagement. I wished to leave you free, (so far free indeed as it was possible for two kindred natures to feel free of each other, between whom a mysterious affinity existed which was equally felt by both). Sophie, I have not delayed a moment in idle trifling : this is earnest sober truth. I may have erred in judgment, but my intention has been ever just and true. Do you believe me now ? ”

“ Yes, I believe [you ; I believe you speak the truth.”

“ And you *will* marry me, Soph ; you *will* be my wife ! ”

“ Eric, I had resolved never to marry : there was little enough of happiness in the lot of either Florence or Angelica to tempt me to tread in their footsteps ; but——”

“ But you will not *keep* your resolves, Sophie dear. We are almost the last left of our race ; we

*must* be all in all to each other. Ernie, too, wishes for our union. You will give me your hand, Soph?"

"There is my hand, Eric, at last: my heart you know I gave you long ago."

\* \* \* \*

"And where shall we spend our honeymoon, Sophie dear?" inquired Eric, as the day for our union drew near.

"Why not let us go into Wales?" I replied. "There are lovely scenes, picturesque costumes; and I should like to revisit once more those old half-forgotten spots,

"In that kingdom by the sea,"

where we gathered shells and sea-weed; the old shop where we purchased the ingredients for making 'hard-bake;' the pond where mamma's pony stood up to his girths in water with her on his back, obdurately unmindful of whip, spur, or volleys of stones from the surrounding margin."

"Well, dear Soph, let it be Wales, if you wish it; but beyond the almost morbid excitement



one feels in wandering in after years over the scenes of childhood, there is, I think, but little real pleasure or profit in the occupation. However, if you like it, let it be Wales."

Ours was a very quiet wedding. Ernest gave me away, and never did man bestow a gift with more willing heart I honestly believe; we had few flowers, no favours, no soba, and no speeches. Otho was laid up with a fit of the gout, and could not be present; but he sent a very kind letter and a draft for a hundred pounds. Louis Grey tied the knot, unassisted by any more or less eligible divine; but Florence was absent, being unable to leave her progeny at Whirlingham. Miss Crockett was chief bridesmaid, assisted by the Twins, and was the life of the party. There was but one *contretemps*, one moment's drawback to our merriment; this occurred in the vestry at the moment of signing the register.

Some evil spirit prompted Hilda to venture the remark, attended by one of her usual giggles, that "marriages were made in heaven."

The effect of this proverb upon Jenny Wren was terrible; she suddenly stopped short in the midst

of writing her name, turned red, and then pale; appeared to be struggling violently for words wherewith to anathematise the wretched culprit; then drawing a deep breath, and raising her huge official bouquet high in the air, she hurled it deliberately at Hilda's empty head, accompanying the act with the suppressed exclamation, "You idiot!"

"My dear Sophie," she said, with great agitation, in reply to my whispered remonstrance, "I am very sorry: I could not help it; but let us be thankful; had it not been in a church, something terrible must have happened. It's a mercy it was not the inkstand I threw! To poison us with her proverbs; at such a moment too—unnatural girl!"

We sat down to the usual orthodox breakfast, Miss Crockett cutting the cake; which was not much more nasty than wedding-cakes usually are. The lion's share of this usually much prized article of food found its way into the house-keeper's room, whence portions were duly transmitted to all friends—not forgetting Ben Jermin, Dull Billy, and Phœbe Sackett.

"Well, Soph dear," said Eric, as he threw himself into the carriage, "it's all over now, thank God."

"Yes," was my reply, "and I am the more happy that I have kept my resolve of so many years standing."

"What resolve?" said he, rather quickly.

"To live and die Sophie Denne."

\* \* \* \* \*

As for the trip to Wales, Eric was quite right: the old spots, from the felling of trees, filling of hollows, and turning of lanes, were so altered that they were scarcely recognisable; houses once beheld with reverence now looked insignificant; people once well known, who had lived and moved and played their part upon our tiny stage, were now so completely forgotten that their names were mouthed unfamiliarly by the present race. Everything tended to raise such mournful memories that, in spite of its being our wedding tour, we both were glad to turn our backs upon the Principality and find ourselves once more amid the distractions of London.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here ends the Chronicle of the Dennes of Daundelyonn, and sad as the fate of some among our number has been, yet we cannot consider ourselves wholly unfortunate. Angelica has been taken from us, but Florence still lives in comparative comfort. Harold has disappeared, and Edwy is at rest beneath the wide waters of the Pacific; but Otho is prosperous, and Ernest happy. The Twins still vegetate, it is all that they are capable of, and they seem to be contented with their lot.

For ourselves—well—some years have passed since we married; Eric *says* he is happy, and I know that I *feel* so. Our friends (and they are numerous) tell us that we look younger than ever, a flattering assertion which I am inclined to doubt, for grey hairs are coming upon us; but we have health, abundant occupation, and are rich in mutual affection, besides possessing worldly wealth sufficient to enable us to live in a style which, with our moderate desires, may be considered luxury: altogether, I think we may be considered as lucky people.

“Sophie, my dear,” said Miss Crockett, during

her last visit, "it does my heart good to see you and Eric get on so well together; you are the happiest couple I know; it was but the other day that I was saying so to Mrs. Fenton, and she was regretting that you have no children: I told her I thought it was a very good thing, for, though you both like children in the abstract, you do not in the least crave any of your own."

"You were quite right there, dear Miss Crockett," was my reply; "some people seem born with a genius for managing them, they seem gifted with a natural taste for children as other folks are for plants or pictures; I have not this gift: to say the best of it, mine is a passive rather than an active taste, which is very easily appeased, and Eric positively dislikes them."

"So I told Mrs. Fenton, but I doubt if she believed me."

"I'll be sworn she did not," interposed Eric, who had entered the room unobserved during our conversation. "We are in a glorious minority: I fear most people hold children, to be the greatest

blessing in life, but we think somewhat differently, don't we, Soph?"

"Children!" exclaimed Miss Crockett, oracularly; "it may not become me as a single woman to give so decided an opinion upon such a subject, but you know what that opinion was of old, and is still—I consider children a care when good, and a curse when bad."

"And bad are the best," continued Eric, smiling: "I quite agree with you, and think, as far as these small people are concerned, that a little of their company goes a great way; but you had better not say so to Mrs. Fenton, she would be excessively shocked, and down upon you like a shot with a host of good sentences, such as 'happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them,' and so on."

"There!" cried Miss Crockett, starting up, "that's the very quotation she made use of—but who was the originator of that remark? Why Solomon, to be sure!—and, as to Solomon—Sophie, my dear, you know my opinion of that person. I told you from the first that I thought him a greatly over-rated man—vain,

selfish, and unprincipled, and, if anything were needed to confirm me in my judgment, it would be the very passage you mention."

"But, dear Miss Crockett," pleaded Eric, "you know that in patriarchal times——."

"Oh! don't talk to me about patriarchal times," said Miss Crockett, pettishly; "these are not patriarchal times, and I maintain that to spread such a doctrine as Solomon's, with bread at tanpence the quartern, is positively monstrous. No—no! Bless your kind fortune that you have no children. You may depend upon it, Eric, that although as a general axiom I deny its truth, yet, in this particular instance, we may safely quote your poor dear father's well-remembered maxim—  
'All is for the best!'"

THE END.

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